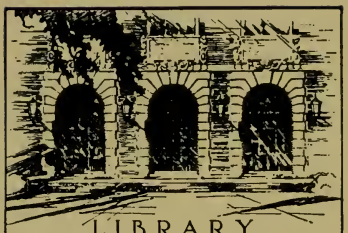

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TIME'S REVENGES

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF

JOSEPH'S COAT 'VAL STRANGE' 'BOB MARTIN'S LITTLE GIRL ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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TIME'S REVENGES

CHAPTER XXXIII

The outlook of things in general grew extremely sombre for Mr. Dogdyke. It was all the worse for him, because he had been altogether persuaded that the secret of which he had knowledge would maintain him, if not in affluence, at least in ease, for the remainder of his natural life. He had grown so accustomed to that belief that it was very, very hard to part with it. Nobody wanted to buy his secret; nobody was willing to be blackmailed. There were millions—actual millions sterling—in the hands of the people whom the secret affected, and they could well have afforded something out of their own abundance.

The contemplation of these facts grew, at moments, to be almost maddening, and the wretched Dogdyke would pause in the streets to groan aloud, to the astonishment of the passers-by. Since he had abandoned his lodging he had no courage to face the waiting landlady, and was compelled by his own cowardice to leave his belongings in her hands. He found employment of a sort in selling sewing machines on commission on the hire system, but business was extremely slack, and Dogdyke was far from thriving. The work held body and soul together, and that was all. After a while he summoned up courage enough to write to Barton and his wife, and when he had once despatched the letters, he was always leaving his employment to crawl off to the address he had given to see if a response had yet arrived.

Day after day passed by, and no answer reached him. He grew desperate, and followed up his appeal in a note of sesquipedalian

pathetics, in which he represented himself as being on the very verge of starvation. He besought Barton to remember that he had once had it in his power to be of service to him, and he dwelt at length on the affection which he had always felt for his infant charge, and the interest with which he had watched his growth to manhood.

Dogdyke's letters made both Barton and his wife angry, for it was beyond dispute that the little man had behaved with great ingratitude; but one day Mary, having some shopping to do in George Street, saw the woebegone Dogdyke from her carriage, and read a change in him which seemed pitiable. His clothes had always been too large for him, but now he shrank within them like a withered walnut in its shell. His nose was pinched, and his eyes were almost colourless; it was warm weather, yet he walked in a kind of shiver, his hands tucked under his great coat-cuffs, and his feet tottering as if they felt the burden of his shrunken body too much

for them. He made a face of dreadful entreaty when he caught sight of her, and clapping his thumb and finger on his stubbly chin, stood with a cringing air, uncertain whether to advance or no, and not daring to offer any open sign of recognition. The carriage was at a standstill at the curb, and the shopman was in the act of placing a parcel within it. Mary beckoned to the abject little man, and he shuffled nearer, still with thumb and finger at his chin and his face contorted into the most tearful aspect he could contrive.

'Come to the house,' she ordered him. 'I shall be there as soon as you will. Ask for me. You had better go at once, for you'd hardly like Mr. Barton to see you.'

'Thank you, madam, thank you,' returned Dogdyke, and at once made off at his best pace towards the Grampians.

As he reached the drive the carriage swept past him, and Mrs. Barton, alighting, waited for him at the door.

'You can go in, Dogdyke,' she said, 'and I'll be with you in a moment.'

He bared his head with great humility, and choked twice or thrice by way of expressing a gratitude too deep for words. The coachman had driven away the carriage, and they were alone.

'You said in your letter,' she questioned him, 'that you were starving. Are you hungry?'

Dogdyke laid both his hands upon his epigastrium, but answered not a word.

'Go to the kitchen,' she continued, accepting his silent assent to her question, 'and come to me when you have had something to eat. I will give orders to the servants.'

'Thank you, madam, thank you,' said Dogdyke, and once more shuffled away.

Half-an-hour later, somewhat comforted and looking much less forlorn and aged, he presented himself in the dining-room. He was amazingly meek and furtive, and accepted in silence the severe lecture with which Mrs.

Barton greeted him. But when she took a pocket-book from the table beside her, and drew from it two notes for five pounds, his eyes sparkled for an instant.

'Now mind you, Dogdyke,' she said, 'this is the very last help you'll get. I give it you on one condition only—you promise me to go away—go to Melbourne, and go at once. Write to me, and tell me your address, and some employment shall be found for you. I promised you that Tom should give you work on the old terms, but he is so angry at you that, even if you had offered to come to him, he would not have taken you. I am glad to see,' she added, 'that you have been too much ashamed to make your appearance at the offices. That is the only sign of good I have known in you for many a day. Now take that and go.'

She handed him the notes, which she had folded tightly together in the vigour of her speech, and Dogdyke accepted them with a bow.

'Thank you, madam,' said Dogdyke. 'Thank you. I hope you will believe that I am truly thankful. Literally, madam, I am starving, and for a man who has known better days, as I have, that is hard, Mrs. Barton; it is extremely hard.'

He cried a little, and wiped his eyes with one of his coat-cuffs.

'There, there,' she said, easily mollified. 'You have only to behave yourself to escape anything of that kind in the future. Go to Melbourne—go at once—write to me when you get there, and you shall have work given you to do. After that, everything will depend upon yourself.'

Dogdyke promised he would take the train that very day. He would be glad, he said, to escape from Sydney, where nothing but misfortune had followed him for a long while. He was going on to say that his benefactress would have his prayers, but at this Mrs. Barton cut him short with an unmistakable decision, and he took his leave.

He prowled about aimlessly for the few hours which intervened between his leave-taking and the departure of the train for Melbourne, and in due time reached the station. He had nothing in the way of bagbage, but he bought a pipe, tobacco, and matches, and a newspaper or two with which to beguile the journey, and thus provisioned he took his seat in the hindermost compartment of the train. There was a considerable amount of bustle on the platform, and Dogdyke saw and recognised General Mallard, who was there apparently to see off a friend. The train started, and Dogdyke, who had made himself as small as he could in his corner whilst there was any fear of his being seen by the General, put his head out of the window, and saw the General standing almost alone upon the platform waving his hand in farewell to some person in one of the front carriages, who shook a handkerchief out of the window in response.

This was not much of an event in itself,

but it was absolutely certain that Dogdyke had seen it, and within a very few hours the fact became memorable, and even amazing. General Mallard, to whom the little man was, of course, prepared to swear at any moment, had actually been left behind in Sydney, and there was no train by which he could reach Melbourne until the following day at the same hour. And yet, to Dogdyke's utter and complete amazement, he met General Mallard in the streets of Melbourne within an hour of his own arrival in that city. Now, that was a surprising circumstance, and what made it more surprising was that a quick glance from the General's eye assured him of a recognition on the other side, and told him, with a plainness hardly to be doubted, that General Mallard was afraid of him.

The rencontre took place in Collins Street, and Dogdyke, who had passed within a yard of the General, turned to stare after him. There was no mistaking his identity; there had been the grey moustache and the eye-

glass, and the well-remembered eagle beak —there was the dress, there was the peculiar limp, and the General's very fashion of carrying his stick at his shoulder, like a sabre on the slope.

Mr. Dogdyke was so staggered by this inexplicable fact of the impossibility of General Mallard being in Melbourne, and the other impossibility of being himself mistaken, that, half unconsciously, he followed the General's footsteps, and watched him until he entered the doors of a banking establishment. He lounged about for some ten minutes, and at the end of that time he discerned the figure of Count von Herder, who was walking with all his usual splendour of attire and his ordinary majesty of demeanour along the sidewalk opposite.

The Count obviously recognised Dogdyke, but took no heed of him at all, and the little man was too conscious of the seediness of his own personal aspect to dare to offer an open recognition. He saw the General

emerge somewhat hurriedly from the bank, saw him hail a cab and enter it, and to his further amazement, saw a distinct sign pass between the General and the Count.

A minute later, while he was still in a state of bewilderment about these strange matters, the Count also hailed a vehicle, and gave the driver an address. The man drove off in the same direction as had already been taken by the General's cab, and Mr. Dogdyke, taking advantage of the stopping of a tram-car, took a seat upon it and followed. He would have been puzzled to say why he did so, but there had grown somehow to be a faint suspicion in his mind that the General was not really the General, and that the Count von Herder was in some way associated with him.

What the whole thing might really mean Dogdyke could not guess for his life; but there might be something in it which would be to his own advantage to fathom. Why should anybody personate General Mallard

and go to a bank in that disguise? What had the Count von Herder to do with it? Dogdyke's thoughts began to take a more definite complexion and to grow into shape. He knew the Count, and had done a little dirty work for him; he had been his spy; his fetcher and carrier; his manservant in half-a-dozen little ways, and he knew the man to be daring, cunning, and unscrupulous.

He knew no more, for it was not the Count von Herder's fashion to take anybody into unnecessary confidence, and Dogdyke had learned nothing which he could turn to actual value. The tramcar stopped, and was again arrested at the end of no more than twenty yards. The two vehicles were passing rapidly out of sight, and Dogdyke, with a sudden resolution, leapt from it, and on its next starting darted with all the agility he could command into a vehicle crawling along the street for hire. He bade the driver make his best haste after the retreating cabs. He

kept them eagerly and nervously in sight until they stopped at an hotel on the right-hand side of the street, and driving by with nothing but the top of his nose visible at the window, he saw the General, eye-glassed and moustached no longer, walk without a limp rapidly through the doorway, without a glance at the cabman.

The Count von Herder stopped at the same doorway, entered the hotel, and returning, paid and discharged both drivers. The watcher arrested his cab, and dismissed it; then he stood wondering what the thing might mean, more and more scenting roguery in it, and more and more determined to be at the bottom of the secret. He lingered for an hour or two, but nothing came of his watch; and at last he surrendered it in despair. He was actually moving away, when he saw the ponderous figure of the Count once more. That gentleman was accompanied by a man of much smaller stature than himself, who wore a white hat with a

rakish cock, and whose gait betrayed a self-importance equalling the Count's own. Dogdyke did not know this gentleman's name, but he recognised him at once as having seen him on several occasions in the Count's society in Sydney. He recognised him also as a fellow passenger of yesterday. They had jostled each other in the refreshment buffet at Albury, and Dogdyke was sure of him.

Neither of the men he watched took any notice of him, and Dogdyke, slinking in their track along the street, took wary and watchful note of the younger man. He persuaded himself at length that the slight figure he had seen emerging from the cab and darting into the hotel when the disguise had been half removed, was that of the person now before him, and he grew more and more sure of roguery. There was villainy in it somewhere, he was sure. He itched, ached, burned to be at the bottom of the secret. Why should one man take the trouble so to personate

another—to assume his very aspect and his walk, and in that guise to pay a visit to the bank, unless he meant mischief by it? And why should Dogdyke, who was getting old, and was very poor, and who had a rooted distaste for labour, be left on the other side of the secret, the full possession of which might be profitable?

Whilst he mused thus the Count and Mr. Whateley shook hands and parted. He hid himself in the throng of passengers in a nervous tremor lest he should be himself observed, and then stood for a moment in indecision as to which of them he should follow. He decided to watch the younger man, and ran him to earth in another hotel. Then he waited for hours and hours until he was faint with fatigue and thirst and hunger, but at last his patience was rewarded.

A cab was called to the door, and was heaped with luggage by one of the hotel porters, and then Mr. Whateley emerged, smiling, tipped the man, and was driven

away. Dogdyke heard the order to drive to the railway station, and knew that it was of no further use to follow. He watched the cab drive off, and then found courage to shuffle to the hotel porter and proffer a question.

'I beg your pardon, my friend,' said Dogdyke, 'but a gentleman drove away from here only a moment ago, whom I believe I recognised. I think I knew him,' said Dogdyke, with an apologetic glance at his own seedy attire, 'in more prosperous days at home, but I am not quite certain. Would you mind obliging me with the gentleman's name?'

'His name is Johnson,' said the porter, rather brusquely.

'Ah, ah!' said Dogdyke, 'I thought I was not mistaken, but I didn't care in my present circumstances to make myself known to him. I thank you very much, my friend; I thank you very much.'

The man stared a little, and walked into the hotel. Dogdyke stood rubbing his chin a

little with a feeble and uncertain aspect, and then walked away.

'A gentleman of the name of Johnson'—he would remember that. Possibly the name might be useful to him one of these days—'a gentleman of the name of Johnson.'

He had been in Melbourne before, and he slipped away to a cheap eating-house he knew of, and there refreshed himself after the fatigue of the day. Then he set out to look for a lodging. He had only arrived that morning, and had been able to sleep but little on the journey. He was easily fatigued, and the fact that he had no luggage made him seem an undesirable inmate in some places, so that he had some difficulty in finding a temporary home. At last he paid a fortnight's rent in advance, and by that means secured accommodation. Then he wrote to Mrs. Barton, announcing his whereabouts, and expressing his gratitude for the aid she had already afforded him. He posted his letter, and returned to the mean little room he had

hired, and there undressed and went to bed whilst the sun was still shining. He was too tired to think with clearness, but his last words to himself as he felt sleep coming upon him were, 'A gentleman of the name of Johnson.'

CHAPTER XXXIV

'THERE is really no occasion for any quixotry in the matter.'

The scene was Tom Barton's working-room at home; the speaker was Denton, and Tom himself, with an aspect of considerable perplexity, sat at his desk and surveyed his friend and adviser.

'Everybody who has a right to know anything at all about the matter, knows already. The great world would no doubt take a momentary interest in the affair if the details were brought before it; but then, the great world pokes its nose into a great many things that don't belong to it and with which it has no business. Leave the matter in my hands, Barton. Let me see if I can't arrange it all.'

'No,' said Tom, 'I can't give a blind com-

mission even to you, Denton. What do you mean to do?'

'Let's clear the ground to begin with,' said Denton. 'Let's see exactly where we are. The secret, such as it is, is known to you, and to your wife, to Michael and his sweetheart, to General Mallard, and myself. Now, outside, there are two people, one of whom I think I can threaten into silence; the other doesn't matter a copper to anybody. What that deplorable little drunken Dogdyke may say about you or your affairs will carry weight with no person in the world, and I should seriously advise that you find him some sort of pretended employment, and make no inquiry as to how he fulfils his duty. Find him enough to live on, and let him understand distinctly that he kills the goose that lays the golden eggs if he speaks a word. He doesn't matter, but it's just as well not to have the thing talked about even by him. I can stop the Count, I know. When Mallard recognises the fact that the thing is buried, he will be

probably very much more tractable than we have found him yet.'

'I don't think you'll find the General very tractable,' Barton answered.

'Well,' said Denton, 'we can but try him. Neither you nor Mrs. Barton care to proclaim the truth about Michael's parentage.'

'That's Michael's own affair,' said Barton. 'He'll have no hand in hiding it. And the lad's right! You can't deny that the lad's right.'

He smote his fist upon the desk he sat at, and looked defiantly at his companion.

'I am not denying that the lad is right, Barton,' said Denton, drily. 'I am denying nothing, but Michael himself is willing that matters should go on as they are for the girl's sake, and for the General's sake. All that I am urging is that there is no reason to make the relationship public.'

'No, no!' said Barton, 'there is no reason for that in the world.'

'Then you had better let me see the Count, and arrange with Dogdyke.'

'All right,' said Tom, 'do as you will.' And Denton, exalted by the unexpected success, shook him suddenly by the hand and went swiftly from the room.

The Count von Herder had quite recently taken a bijou residence within a quarter of a mile of Barton's house. He had but just completed the furnishing of this establishment, and had made it quite a beau-ideal place for a bachelor to live in. He had had a quiet house-warming, and to the surprise of the few who knew anything about him had secured a dozen of the best people in the city as his guests. The table had been served in a most *recherché* fashion, and the wine had been of the best quality procurable for love or money. These things Denton knew, and was a little disposed to wonder at. The Count von Herder's financial position had been a matter of mystery to a good many people for the last score of years, and Denton, being aware of

that fact, declined to trouble his wits overmuch about it. He suspected knavery, of course, having some slight acquaintance with the gentleman's history; and as he walked at a brisk step towards the Count's new place of residence, he thought how agreeable and useful it would be to him at this moment to know the exact source from which the Count had drawn his latest supply. That was not to be known, however, and he was prepared to do his best without it.

The manservant, in handsome but quiet livery, received Mr. Denton at the door and took his card. After a moment's absence the man apprised the visitor that the Count von Herder was at home and would receive him.

The domestic livery was subdued, but the Count himself was glorious in a magnificently embroidered dressing-suit of violet velvet. He was smoking a cigarette through a huge amber tube, and when Denton first had sight of him, was lying abroad upon a sofa with one slippered foot cocked high in the air over his

knee. He rose with a display of more agility than might have been counted on in a man of his figure, and received his guest with an exuberant cordiality.

'Ah, my tear Denton,' he said, 'so charmed to see you! I had nefer expected that you would do my poor house such honour.'

He placed a chair for his guest, tapped him delicately with a tip of a forefinger on either shoulder, and seemed in that action to embrace him.

'I have come to talk to you on business, Count von Herder,' said Denton.

He was a trifle drier than usual, in the face of the Count's exuberance.

'Charmed,' said the Count, smilingly; 'telighted, I am sure. Will you take a chair?'

Denton sat down solemnly, and began to pull off his natty black kid gloves.

'Shall I offer you a class of vine?' the Count demanded. 'Permit me to rink.'

His hand was on the bell, and his face

shining with cordial welcome, was turned to Denton. The old gentleman forbade him to ring by a curt gesture.

'Not for me, thank you.'

'Oh!' said the Count. 'No? Chust a single glass of Liebfraumilch. I can assure you that I have a most nople wine, the real chenuine thing. I found it by an amazing accident, here in Sytney. I tit not think such a wine was to be procured here, and it is just the wine for the morning.'

'Thank you,' said Denton, 'I do not drink wine in the morning.'

'No?' said the Count. 'It is a pity. I should have liked to have shown you that wine. I pelieve you are a connoisseur. Permit me, at least, that I offer you a cigarette.'

'No, thank you,' said Denton, stiffening more and more under the Count's amiable hospitality. 'I have come to talk to you on business.'

'And I have already,' replied Count von

Herder, 'done myself the honour to assure you that I am telighted.'

'Sit down, if you please,' said Denton.

'Willingly,' the Count responded, and drawing a chair near that he had placed for his visitor, he bestowed himself in it with a flourish.

'You don't mind my cigarette?' he said, waving it in the air. 'I cannot do without my cigarette of a morning. It is the only form of tobacco for a gentleman smoking in the early part of the day.'

'I am here on business, Count von Herder,' said Denton once more, with a supreme dryness.

'Exactly,' rejoined the Count; 'exactly. Let us talk pusiness. Mr. Denton is a man of affairs, and naturally tesires to lead the conversation to the path in which he shines. I, who am not a man of pusiness, I prefer the field of badinage—of persiflage even. I love the touch-and-go of friently gonversation.'

'When you are at liberty, Count von Herder,' said Denton.

'Aha!' cried the Count, sniffing rejoicingly at the smoke of his cigarette and holding it under his nose to do it. 'We are to be goot and listen. Fery well. Permit me to assure Mr. Denton that I am always at his tisposal. Pardon me for just one instant, while I secure another cicarette and put it in reatiness. So! Now I am at your service.'

He had risen while speaking, had crossed the room, and had taken a cigarette from a little cedar cabinet from a side table; now he returned, waving his cigarette daintily between thumb and fore-finger, and depositing himself in his chair, folded his arms, threw one leg idly over the other, and lay back with an agreeable smile.

'Some time ago,' Denton began, 'you paid a visit to Mr. Michael Hawthorne.'

'Mr. Michael Hawthorne Barton,' said the Count.

Denton declined for an instant to be drawn from what he had to say.

'You intimated to him that you had a document in your possession, which concerned him nearly, and you made a request.'

'Exactly,' said the Count, still smiling.

'You warned him that if that request were not complied with, you would lay that document in the hands of General Mallard.'

'Did I?' said the Count. 'Perhaps I did. My memory does not serf me well about these little dransactions, but it is not unlikely.'

'Mr. Hawthorne,' pursued Denton, 'declined your request in the most unequivocal terms.'

'Inteet, he did,' the Count assented, with every appearance of friendly warmth.

'He ordered you from the house.'

'Exactly, exactly,' cried the Count, still with the same air of friendly assent.

'And defied you to do your worst.'

'Permit me to congratulate you, tear Mr

Denton,' said the Count, 'on the perfect glearness and chustice with which you state your case.'

'You may not be aware,' pursued Denton, quite unmoved on the outside by the other's cool impertinences—'you may not be aware that Mr. Hawthorne at once consulted his parents.'

'The excellent Mr. and Mrs. Barton,' the Count interjected. 'Yes?'

'That having learned from them that your statement, for a wonder, was to be relied upon, he at once took steps to communicate it to General Mallard, and that General Mallard and his daughter have now been for many weeks fully apprised of the facts of the case.'

'So?' inquired the Count.

'That is so,' returned Denton. 'It may interest you to know, therefore, that there is not the slightest probability of Mr. Hawthorne at any time affording you the aid which you were impudent enough to ask at his hand.'

'Now really, really, my tear Dendon,' cried the Count. 'You ought not to talk in this way. I am perfectly willing to be friently. Why should you go out of your way to say unpleasant things? They don't matter much to me, but I should like to see so excellent a chentleman as my good Denton keeping his temper.'

If it were the Count's desire to anger Denton, or if he were merely indulging his own triumph, mattered little. His insolence slid away from his cool old adversary as water from a duck's back. He did not even need to shake himself free of it.

'Mr. and Mrs. Barton, Mr. Michael Hawthorne, and Miss Mallard—whose pardon I sincerely beg for mentioning her name in Count von Herder's presence——'

'Now, now, vy vill you say these things?' cried the amiable Count, beaming all over.

'—— are quite willing to have the whole matter made known to the world at large. They don't court publicity, but they are not in

the least afraid of it, and not in the least to be influenced by it. General Mallard, who was at one time ardently in favour of the match you did your dirty little best to spoil——'

'Oh really, really,' said von Herder.

'—— is now opposed to it,' said Denton, ignoring this interruption as he had ignored its predecessors. 'His opposition might be intensified by publicity, though that is doubtful. In any case, I hope to overcome his scruples. And I desire to tell you that you on your side are absolutely powerless to damage the good people whom I represent. As for that scoundrelly little tool and catspaw of yours, Mr. Dogdyke, he has shot his bolt on his own account, and has been ignominiously dismissed by General Mallard, who, being a gentleman, and a man of honour——'

'The same thing, I assure you, my tear Denton,' said the Count, with a large sweep of the right hand, 'the same thing, I assure you.'

'—— never found himself in the slightest

temptation to submit to being blackmailed by anybody.'

'Quite so, quite so,' said Von Herder, as jovial as ever.

'Now, thus,' said Denton, crossing his fore-fingers in his own quaint fashion—'thus the matter stands: on the one side, your attempt to browbeat Mr. Hawthorne into introducing you to society which you have no earthly claim to enter——'

'Oh, parton, parton, parton,' cried the Count, rising with a sudden serious and even angry air; 'you must not talk in that way, my tear Denton; you must not talk in that way, I assure you. You must permit me to inform you that I am socially equal to any man in Sytney. Your Covernor here—you speak of your Covernor—your Covernor is a mushroom of yesterday. Permit me to inform you that I represent one of the oltest and noplest families in Europe. Permit me to inform you that my patent of nopility is recognised in every Court of Europe, that the

purity of my tecent is unimpeached and unimpeachable.'

'I am aware of that fact, Count von Herder,' said Denton.

'You are aware of it?' the Count inquired, swiftly.

'I am perfectly aware of it,' Denton answered. 'I made inquiries in Berlin, which satisfied me upon that point. You are quite welcome to that admission on my part.'

'Goot, goot,' returned Von Herder, and he resumed his genial air as rapidly as he had cast it off.

'I adhere none the less to my statement,' said Denton, quietly. 'You attempted to coerce Mr. Hawthorne into giving you an introduction to a society with which you were not worthy to mingle, and you have distinctly failed. Now, on our side, Count von Herder, we have one or two things to say. I know something about you, and though it isn't part of my usual business to make mischief, I will make it public unless you retire from that

threatening position which you have seen fit to assume. I am a lawyer, as you know, and I recognise the dangers of libel; but I will cause to be printed over my own name, and circulated throughout this city, certain facts about you which will cause you to be universally tabooed here. I shall await with a perfect sense of security any legal action you may take, and shall defend myself against any legal remedy you may seek. My name is fairly well known here, and will command respect.'

'My tear, tear Denton, I like you, you are an atmirable man of business, and I confess that I could wish to have cultivated that atmirable glearness and impressiveness with which you state a case. It is a thing impossible for me, but I atmire it. I find that one always atmires most that which is least possible for oneself to do. I cannot rival you: permit me to imitate you at a humble tistance. Let me state my case.'

He took up the cigarette he had laid on

the table by way of reserve, lit it at the burning tip of the old one, adjusted it delicately in the amber tube, and took a well-enjoyed whiff or two, inhaling the smoke and expelling it through his nostrils.

'So!' he began, 'let me assure you that when I approached Mr. Hawthorne with the request you have described, I did so with no intention to threaten him at all. You, my tear Denton, have threatened me, and I thought it would be worth my while to make you hold your hand. So far, at least, you have held your hand. I do not any longer tesire or need Mr. Hawthorne's introduction to society in Sytney—I have that society at my feet already; but I am quite willing to make a pargain with you. If you will say nothing about me, I will say nothing about your excellent and esteemed clients. I happen to have the orichinal document and its copy close at hand. If you will give me your word of honour that you will leave me unattacked, I will give you my honourable

assurance that I will leave your clients unattacked. I have played my game without Mr. Hawthorne's aid, and I have won it.'

'I propose to ask you, Count von Herder,' said Denton, 'for a surrender of those documents.'

'I am afraid that in that respect I cannot oplige you,' said the Count.

'Very well,' returned Denton. 'In the "Sydney Morning Herald" of last Monday is a list of the gentlemen who attended an entertainment at your house on the previous Saturday. If I leave you without the original and the copy of which you have already spoken, I shall hire a carriage, I shall drive to the residence of each of those gentlemen in turn, and I shall lay before them excellent reasons why they should not continue to know the Count von Herder.'

'Fery well,' said the Count, with a little laugh, 'you are too insistent, my goot Denton. You have so insinuating and charming a way with you that there is no tenying you any-

thing. You must have your tocuments; but, mind you, petween men of honour a bargain is a bargain.'

'Surrender those documents,' said Denton, 'and I will say nothing; but understand this distinctly, Count von Herder, I don't know, and I don't want to know, the source of this present splendour.'

'I am glat you like the little place,' said the Count.

'But, understand me, if I find that you are using your name in the old shameful and criminal fashion, I shall make it my duty to expose your past.'

'My goot Denton,' said the Count, 'I haf your word of honour that you respect my past. I shall not ask you for any guarantee of my future. Come, now, I shall rely upon your wort.'

'Very well,' said Denton, 'you have it. Give me the documents and let me go.'

CHAPTER XXXV

In his own demure way the old gentleman triumphed when he left the Count's residence.

'And now,' he said, 'for General Mallard. I fancy these papers and the Count's promise should have some weight with him.'

There were hundreds of people in the world who would have smiled outright at the idea that John Denton, of all men, should devote himself heart and soul, without fee or reward, to the advancement of the prosperous issue of a love affair. But Denton, hardened old bachelor as he was, had for years taken charge of Michael Hawthorne, and he had learned to love the boy as if, in place of standing coldly *in loco parentis* to him, he had really been his father. If he had been asked the question bluntly, 'What did he most desire

in the world?' he might have found one or two other answers which on the surface would have looked true enough, but the real answer to the problem would have been, to see Michael Hawthorne happy. That in the main had been what the prim old gentleman had lived for these many years, and he experienced a glow of unusual pride and satisfaction in having made at least one step towards the consummation of that hope. The General's house was within an easy five or six minutes' walk, and the General was at home. Denton was admitted to him, and invited to disclose his business. The two elderly gentlemen were seated in Mallard's library, and Denton, having fixed his glasses on his nose, unbuttoned his trim frock-coat, and drawing the papers from his pocket, laid them across his knees.

'I have this morning,' he said, 'had an interview with the Count von Herder, who has surrendered these papers to me. It was through the accidental fact that these documents fell into his hands that Mr. Dogdyke

made to you the revelation which forestalled Mr. Barton's statement.'

'I don't think, Denton,' returned the General, 'that I care to resume any inquiry into that business. I may tell you definitely that my mind is made up upon the matter.'

'I don't know that,' said Denton. 'If you'll forgive me for saying so, I am not without hope of changing it. Let us look at the case. Here in my hands is the only proof of the truth of the story which has been told to you. Besides, apart from the persons concerned, there is nobody now who can be said to have possession of the facts. Count von Herder has surrendered his hold, and has given me an undertaking to preserve absolute silence in future. I can assure you as a professional man—and I know that you will accept my word—I can assure you that Count von Herder will keep his promise. I have every reason to know that I can offer you that assurance with certainty. As for Dogdyke, he is a drunken and disreputable little person,

whose unsupported statement would be actually worthless anywhere, and I think I can promise you that I shall be able to make arrangements which will close his lips as completely as I have closed those of the Count. These papers, I must inform you, have not been purchased, and we are not guilty of paying blackmail in any form. As I have already said this morning, we do not court publicity, but we are not at all afraid of it. Now, my dear General, why not consent at once to consider the matter dead and buried?'

General Mallard made an impatient movement, but Denton hurriedly waved him down and went on with his pleading.

'I know the boy, Mallard—I have known him nearly all his life. A more honourable, upright, and noble-hearted fellow I have never met. He was under my guardianship until he was twenty-one, and he came to me in early childhood. I have a right to speak of him, and my voice should have some authority.

You have told me already that your daughter is determinately obstinate in the matter, and you cannot honestly declare that you have not in your heart a certain commendation for her fidelity and firmness of character.'

'Rubbish!' said the General. 'Nonsense!'

'But, my dear sir, you have,' Denton pursued. 'She has confessed to me, and naturally *you* feel it. You have never been in opposition before. The girl's heart is deeply interested, and she feels it to be a question of honour with her as well as of affection. Now, much as you oppose this match, you would not wish your daughter consciously to go back from what she conceives to be the dictates of honour.'

'The engagement was made,' cried the General, with much heat—'innocently made, I admit—under the impression that circumstances were not as they are.'

'Exactly,' cried Denton, 'and that satisfies you, and would if I were in your place

satisfy me; but then, you see, it doesn't happen to satisfy the young lady.'

'Mere wilful obstinacy,' said the General. He was on his feet, and limping excitedly up and down the room by this time. 'Nothing more or less, Denton—mere wilful obstinacy.'

The old barrister had laid out his plan of campaign, and though he was met by a force equal to his own in intensity, and far more tumultuous, he was prepared to fight to the end. How the argument might have gone, it is hardly worth while to speculate, for at this moment it was interrupted. The General's manservant rapped at the door at this instant, and entered in obedience to his master's call.

'An orderly has just ridden up with this from Government House, sir.'

The General took a letter from the salver the servant stretched out to him, and half absently broke the seal, after a purely mechanical survey of the address.

'Excuse me, Denton,' he said; 'this may call for some reply.'

He had not even observed the fact that the letter bore the English post-mark, and had simply been addressed to him at the Government House. He threw the envelope on the table, and Denton, glancing casually at it, possessed himself of this fact, and read from it the General's extreme disturbance. The servant had retired, and the General, adjusting his folding glasses on his nose, glanced at the letter. His lips moved, as he followed the lines, and an inarticulate mumble reached Denton's ears. But suddenly the reader clapped his hands to his forehead with a disordered gesture, and strode to the window.

'Why, what in the name of all that's wonderful——' he began, and having read another line or two he broke out, 'The man's mad: stark mad! I gave him no instructions.'

'No bad news, I hope,' said Denton, rising in some surprise at his companion's agitation.

'The man's in charge of every pennyworth of stock I have in the world,' cried the

General, 'and he sends me here the maddest letter I ever had in my life.'

'Come,' said Denton, 'that's serious.'

'Listen to this,' said the General, bracing himself, and adjusting his glasses anew. 'It's written on the fellow's office paper, and it carries his business heading. It's written, too, in his own handwriting:—

'"Bedford Row, February 22nd.

'"Sir,—I have this day, in pursuance of your instructions, disposed of the following stock: Australian Silver Five per Cent., 14,450*l.* 13*s.* 8*d.*; Egyptian Four per Cent., 37,250*l.* 13*s.* 8*d.*; French Three per Cent., 12,241*l.*; Italian Five per Cent., 48,440*l.*; Japanese Seven per Cent., 8,119*l.* You will find inclosed a memorandum, from which you will see that the total increase in value of stock since your departure from England amounts to 5,232*l.* 6*s.* 4*d.* The Japanese investments have proved the most valuable of all. In obedience to your letter, I forwarded

to Menzies' Hotel at Melbourne the cable requested, and on the same day received the promised word, 'Transfer.' I at once took the transaction in hand, and carried it through with all possible dispatch, and wired the proceeds, less commission, to the Consolidated Colonial Bank in Melbourne. Your second cablegram, 'Money received,' did not reach me until half-an-hour ago, and the matter is now completed, I trust entirely to your satisfaction. I am, sir, yours respectfully,

'"Wm. Ed. Ruston."'

'But do you mean to tell me——' Denton began.

The General cut him short, wildly.

'That I know absolutely nothing of this. I know nothing, nothing, nothing! I have not written a line of instructions to the man since I left England.'

'Let's look at things,' said Denton. 'This letter is dated February 22nd. Here we are at the 6th of April, and the man declares that

the money was transferred to your order by cable and acknowledged by you six weeks ago.'

'The man's mad!' cried the General.

'Perhaps not,' said Denton; 'but obviously your first business is to wire to this bank to ascertain if a transfer has been made.'

'That must be done at once,' the General assented.

He rang the bell loudly, and ordered his carriage.

'Be quick, quick, quick!' he said to the servant, who stood for a moment in amazement at his unusual vivacity of manner, and then darted away.

'Do you think, Denton,' he asked, 'that there can be anything serious in this?'

'I can say nothing till you get an answer from the Melbourne Bank,' said Denton; 'but I am afraid it looks as if it might be very serious indeed. Was there anybody except your agent who was aware of the precise nature of your investments?'

'Not a soul,' said Mallard. 'I have consulted Ruston, and Ruston only. I always supposed him to be a smart man of business. The only conclusion I can come to,' he added, groaningly, 'is that the man's mad.'

'I wish there were grounds to hope that it might prove so,' Denton answered, 'for on any other explanation the matter is grave indeed.'

When the General had recovered from the first shock which this astonishing communication had brought to his nerves, he showed considerable fortitude. Denton accompanied him to the telegraph office, and assisted him in drawing out a despatch:—

'Manager, Consolidated Colonial Bank, Melbourne.—Have you received any considerable amount to my credit from Ruston, London?'

The message was despatched, and the two waited at the post-office itself for a response. It came in a little over an hour:—

'General Mallard, Sydney.—Nothing re-

ceived since February the 24th, when paid you personally one hundred and twenty-four thousand pounds.'

They had wandered out into the street for a minute, and on returning had been hailed from the counter.

'A wire for you, sir.'

The General accepted it, opened it, and read it. A sudden tremor shook him from head to foot, and his face was ghastly. He laid a hand upon the counter for support, and with the other held out the message to Denton.

'"Paid you personally,"' said the barrister.

'The whole world's mad together,' stammered Mallard, 'or am I going mad myself?'

'Come,' said Denton, 'the people are beginning to stare at us. Control yourself; let me help you to the carriage. We must catch the Melbourne mail to-night.'

He assisted the General to the street, and helped him to a seat in the carriage.

'Wait there,' he said; 'I will send a wire to the bank declaring that you never ordered the transfer of the money. Those,' he asked, 'are your instructions?'

The General nodded, brokenly. He had aged twenty years in aspect in the last half-hour.

Denton ran back, wrote his telegram, and handed it to the clerk. Mallard, who was helpless, could only say feebly, now and then, that the whole world was mad together. That seemed the one idea he could grasp at. Denton took the conduct of affairs into his own hands, drove back to the General's house, ordered a portmanteau to be packed with necessaries; drove to Barton's, hurriedly explained the astonishing condition of affairs there, prepared himself for the journey, and then got back to Mallard, and drove with him to the station.

They arrived in ample time, but every minute dragged like a day, and Denton, used as he was to transactions of this sort, grew

hungrily excited. Even if he had had the faintest reason to doubt the General's story—and there was not even a suggestion of such a doubt in his mind—his manner would have confirmed it amply. This prodigious sum of money had been extracted by some unusually complete and cunning piece of villainy from the hands of its proper custodian, and by some daring personation had been drawn from the banker's hands in Melbourne. So much was clear, and the old criminal barrister was keen as a sleuth-hound on the scent. There was no clue as yet to guide him, and all the way to Melbourne he burned with excitement. He had had to take the whole conduct of the journey upon his shoulders; had engaged sleeping-berths, and had wired ahead for dinner. Mallard could eat nothing, but he drank a glass or two of wine, and came slowly back to some semblance of the possession of his faculties.

'If the money is lost, Denton,' he said, shakily, as they sat side by side together, 'it

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is a terrible blow to me. I began life as a rich man, but my speculations have been ill-conducted always. I have been unlucky, and have lost heavily. If this goes everything goes.'

'You have the abbey, and the estate about it,' Denton asked somewhat solicitously.

'Oh, yes,' returned Mallard, 'the abbey and the estate about it, but nothing to keep it up with now. If this dreadful news is true, I shall have to put the place upon the market. It is all the money I have in the world.'

A boy on the platform of the Sydney station had pressed some newspapers upon him, and he had paid for them mechanically. He tried to read one of them now, but could make nothing of the printed page. He surrendered the effort despairingly.

'It is a pity,' said Denton, 'a grievous pity, that the intelligence comes so late. In six weeks the men who had the brains to plan a *coup* like this could have obliterated every

trace; they are probably out of the country long and long ago.'

'You think,' asked the General, with a pitiable eagerness—'you think it looks as if a *coup* had been planned?'

'There is no other solution to the problem,' Denton answered. 'You have been marked out for a gigantic fraud, and I am afraid it has succeeded. That sounds like the talk of one of Job's comforters, but I think you will be wise to look forward to the worst.'

The old barrister did not speak in mere cruelty or coldness of heart when he said this, for he knew the measure of the man he addressed. Mallard had been unhinged by the shock, as any man in the world would have been, but now that there seemed a certainty that the terrible news was true, he braced himself to meet it, and five hours afterwards, when Denton drew aside the curtains of his sleeping-berth and looked across at his companion, he saw, to his own

profound surprise, and somewhat to his admiration, that the General was lying peacefully asleep.

'He takes it like a soldier,' thought Denton, and so lay back again, himself quite sleepless. The thought suddenly intruded itself into his mind that Von Herder was living in luxury, and he sat up in his berth with clasped hands and glittering eyes.

'That fellow's in it,' he declared, with an inward sense of certainty. 'Whateley's with him.'

The assumption was likely enough, but as yet, at least, he was far away from proof. The night crawled to its end, day came on, and almost as soon as the bank was open, Denton and the General presented themselves there to the manager.

'I learn from your wire of yesterday,' said the General, 'that you received the sum of one hundred and twenty-four thousand pounds to my credit on the 24th of February?'

'Yes, sir,' the manager answered; 'we received such a sum.'

'And that, on the same day, you paid it away?'

The manager half rose from his seat, and looked at General Mallard with a glittering eye.

'We paid it away.'

'To whom?' the General asked.

The manager dropped back into his seat, with a little hectic colour on either cheek, his face otherwise grey.

'The money was paid to you, sir!'

CHAPTER XXXVI

'THAT,' cried the General, in an agitated voice, 'is absolutely false!'

'Indeed, sir,' said the bank manager, in a voice of only half-interested inquiry.

Denton, looking at him with that keen eye of his, sharpened by years of practised observation in the criminal courts, thought that the bank manager rather overdid his certainty, and was less sure of the General's identity than he pretended to be.

'I have not been in Melbourne,' cried the General, 'for more than three months, and there is not a day in the whole time for which I am not able to account.'

'The matter, you observe,' said Denton, laying a hand on his companion's arm, and addressing himself to the manager, 'is very

simple. General Mallard, as you very well know, occupies, for the time being, a high official position, and could not conceal his whereabouts. As a matter of fact, I know from my own diary that General Mallard and I were dining at Government House in Sydney on the evening of the 24th of February. That is a fact which may be verified by an appeal to the Governor of New South Wales. You observe, therefore, that it is quite idle to insist on your belief that General Mallard was the man to whom this great sum of money was paid away. This is a case of very cunning and daring fraud, and you must do your best to assist us in tracing it.'

'When I received your wire, sir,' said the manager, speaking somewhat tremulously, 'I naturally looked up such documentary evidence as I had. I found a letter from you'—he addressed the General—'dated from your own house in Sydney, stating that you expected a large sum of money to your credit

here, declining to specify the precise amount, because of a possible fluctuation in the value of stocks, but setting it somewhere about one hundred and twenty-thousand pounds. The letter expresses your intention of calling in person on the following day to draw it, and I have a receipt for the money in the same handwriting. Will you be good enough to examine these, and tell me if they resemble your own hand?'

He passed two sheets of paper across the table, and the General, accepting them with shaking fingers, examined them, and then handed them to Denton without a word. The imitation was remarkable. The Count had done his work with a really amazing dexterity.

'That is an astonishingly able forgery,' said Denton, handing the letters back. 'But that it is forgery is too obvious for discussion.'

'You repudiate the authorship of this letter, General Mallard?' asked the manager.

'Absolutely,' returned Mallard, 'absolutely.'

'And you deny having given this receipt?'

'Absolutely,' the General repeated.

'In that case I see nothing for it, gentlemen, but to communicate immediately with the police.'

'One minute,' said Denton. 'I notice here that the figures in the receipt are not in the same handwriting as the rest of the document. Am I right in supposing that the person who presented himself as General Mallard had this document made out in readiness when he came to you?'

'He had,' returned the manager.

'Being uncertain of the sum to be drawn, he had left a space for the amount blank?'

'That is so.'

'And who filled it in for him?'

'I wrote those figures,' the manager responded. 'The person calling himself General Mallard professed to having injured his right hand, and had it bound up in a handkerchief.'

'That did not strike you,' Denton asked, 'as being at all suspicious?'

'No,' said the manager. 'Why should it?'

'I shall hold the bank responsible for this transaction,' cried the General.

'I am very sorry for your loss, General Mallard,' the official responded; 'but you will find that you have no grounds for action against the bank. You need hardly have a better authority for that than your friend, Mr. Denton.'

The General turned on Denton eagerly, and the latter shook his head.

'No,' he said, 'no action lies against the bank. There is no privity between yourself and them. Your only action is against Ruston, and I should be inclined to think, from the accuracy of this imitation of your handwriting, that he is not open to any charge of having acted without reasonable precaution.'

'Then,' said the General, 'I am a ruined man!'

He folded his gold-rimmed reading glasses, put them away in his waistcoat pocket, buttoned his frock-coat slowly and determinately, and adjusted his gloves.

'I am a ruined man,' he repeated; 'but at least I will try to track the scoundrel down.'

'The scoundrels,' said Denton. 'There are two of them.'

'How do you arrive at that conclusion?' asked the manager.

'Easily,' returned Denton. 'The forger is one person; the man who passed himself as General Mallard is another. If that had not been so, there would have been no need for him to have asked you to fill in the sum.'

'Let us see the police,' said Mallard. 'You will accompany us?'

The manager assented, and they left the bank together. A four-wheeled cab was called, and they rode off upon their errand.

'Tell me,' said Denton—'the man who

presented himself on the 24th of February, in what respects did he resemble General Mallard?'

'In all respects. In voice, walk, manner, features. I remember, now, observing one thing,' he continued. 'It struck me as being singular that a gentleman of General Mallard's reputation as a soldier should use powder, and I noticed that the man's face was powdered. It was hardly perceptible, but it led me to look at the man with some curiosity. He had been in my room two or three minutes before I noticed it, and I thought it was possibly some curious foppery about complexion.'

'Now that you have the real General Mallard before you,' said Denton, 'are you able to specify any difference between him and the man who passed for him?'

The manager scrutinised the General long and earnestly, examining him from head to foot.

'No,' he said, after a lingering inclination, at last, 'I see no difference. I had not had

the pleasure of meeting General Mallard when he was in Melbourne, though I had been specially invited to do so. I saw him once or twice in the street, and on one occasion I caught a distant glimpse of him—only a glimpse—at a garden party.'

'My experience,' said Denton, 'has led me into contact with criminals of all sorts. I have defended and prosecuted the cleverest of their tribes—but I know no man capable of such a deception.'

'Understand me, gentlemen,' cried the manager with some emphasis, 'I am forced to accept General Mallard's declaration and your own, and I do so completely. But if the man who presented himself to me on the 24th of February last were now to change places with the General, I don't believe that I should be aware of it.'

'H'm,' said Denton, and gave no further answer. It was natural, to his way of thinking, that the manager, in his eagerness to exculpate himself from any possibility of blame,

would exaggerate the completeness of the resemblance.

They reached the police-station, found instant access to the chief, and laid the case fully before him. He, as a matter of course, listened intently, made copious notes, and left the matter practically where it was.

Denton was mightily tumbled up and down in mind, as John Bunyan says, as to whether he had any moral right to express his airy suspicion of the Count von Herder. He thought it very much more likely than not that the Count and Whateley had been together for purposes of mischief of some sort, and it was well within the bounds of possibility to his thinking that they had been concerned in this matter, but he was altogether without proof even of the faintest kind, and he had pledged his word to the Count that, on receipt of the documents surrendered to him, his lips were sealed with respect to that gentleman's past career. Could he have set the police to investigate the sources of the Count's newly-

displayed wealth, he believed it fully possible that something might come of it. Finally, he decided that his suspicions were too faintly grounded to authorise him to break a pledge so definitely and completely given.

Before night the city rang with the news, and intelligence of the gigantic fraud on General Mallard was wired to the uttermost ends of the earth. More or less it interested millions, but of all the countless people who devoured the news none fell on it more eagerly than John Dogdyke. He read it in the evening paper in a cheap restaurant at tea-time.

'Colossal Fraud!' he read. 'Astounding Impersonation! Extraordinary Criminal Courage and Cunning!'

These startling head-lines gave Dogdyke an instant appetite. He was one of those people who find their fullest mental pabulum in the records of the police-court. A brutal murder was a godsend to him, and a divorce case which gave its six columns a day to the

daily journals was a *trouvaille* of the richest sort. He propped the paper against a water-bottle, rubbed his hands beneath the table, settled his glasses upon his nose, and then delaying mental appetite in favour of physical, took one cut at his cold mutton, and with a morsel on the point of his fork read the first line. The morsel fell untasted, and, dropping knife and fork with a noisy clatter, he snatched up the paper, turned himself bodily round to secure a better light upon it, and read with an intense and almost passionate eagerness. He had caught at the second glance the name of General Mallard, and coupling this with the astounding impersonation, leapt at once to his conclusion.

The sham General Mallard, the gentleman by the name of Johnson, and the Count von Herder sprang instantly to mind, and every line in the narrative he read made his inward certainty more sure. The papers had the whole details of the case so far as it was known,

and by the time he had read to the last line there was no room for doubt in his mind.

Dogdyke sat and trembled. He had been well-to-do nearly all his life, and for three or four brief years had been rich. Now he was poor and growing old. He was compelled to labour, a thing in itself horribly distasteful to him, and rendered the more distasteful by the fact that he had for a brief time tasted the sweets of perfect idleness. A certain rebellious spirit often stirred complaint feebly within him against the harshness of his fate. There were so many people in the world who were never called upon to do anything, men who rode in carriages, instead of having to walk about; men who drank champagne when it pleased them; men who could order meals of the most delicate description, at any hour of the day or night; whilst he, John Dogdyke, went afoot in all weathers, was enforcedly abstemious in respect to alcoholic stimulants and table delicacies, and, most hateful and

lamentable of all, was compelled to make at least a show of industry.

The mere pretence of that last abomination stirred almost as profound a sense of bitterness in him as the reality. He loathed even to seem to work. And now here, on a sudden, the real land of El Dorado seemed to glow before his eyes. The Count von Herder, who had made him his tool and catspaw, who had had power over him, and had forced him to a hundred degrading offices, was rich. One half of this prodigious hoard—Dogdyke was as sure of it as if the whole history of the facts had unrolled themselves before his eyes —was in the Count's possession. Dogdyke would share that half. No more work, no more short commons, no more sparing of brandy and tobacco. The celestial lubberland opened wider and wider before him as he gazed, and grew fairer and more fair to his entranced imagination. He stood on Pisgah's height, and before him lay the land of promise, abounding in delicacies less wholesome, but to

him more valuable, than milk and honey. But it struck him coldly all of a sudden that a wilderness of trouble lay between.

The Count was a big man, and had already proved to Dogdyke the fact that he could bully with effect and authority; and, apart from that, he was a man of wiles, and could escape from or explain a thousand things, any one of which would have pinned Dogdyke to the earth. There was obviously nothing for it but to be perfectly prepared, and Dogdyke resolved to track by way of beginning the gentleman who bore the name of Johnson. That he and the Count had been associated on that memorable day there was no shadow of a doubt.

It is true with most men that they believe what they desire to think, and it was especially true with Dogdyke. It is especially true with all feeble and purposeless people. Much thinking and a good deal of fruitless longing had brought him to the fixed conviction that the personator of General Mallard

and the gentleman who had passed by the name of Johnson were one and the same. He had but suspected this on the day on which the two—or the one, as it might be—came beneath his eye. But in the course of time he had grown sure of it.

The history of that strange day had then been a matter of curious speculation to him, and now the story of the newspaper brought it all into startling life and reality. The gentleman by the name of Johnson was the man to be traced, and Dogdyke knew already that the end of the clue he had to follow would lead him inevitably to the Count von Herder. Then, he was fully aware of the fact, his troubles would begin. A less bribe than thirty thousand pounds would hardly have stirred his courage so far as to lead him in arms against an adversary so formidable ; but thirty thousand pounds meant glorious ease for life, a release from all the pains and penalties of existence, an immediate and absolute translation into bliss. He would have

dared anything for it, and in his dingy little soul a fire of resolve awoke.

He left the cold mutton scornfully in a kind of indignation at it, paid his sixpence, and walked out into the street. He recognised at once the impossibility of moving without money, and he saw that his inquiry must start at Sydney. There were three days to wait before he touched his weekly wage, and he groaned at that reflection. Remembering, however, that he had at least seemed to be assiduous in his new duties, and calling to mind the fact that he had not yet made any unauthorised claim upon his employer's exchequer, he resolved on the morrow to ask for the advance of his week's salary for a special purpose, and with that, if he obtained it, to cast himself upon the stream of hope, and let it carry him whither it might.

He spent a night of dreadful excitement, in the course of which he evolved a story to justify his attempt to borrow, and in the morning took this narrative to his employer,

who, having but a brief experience of his man, believed him, handed to Dogdyke four £1 notes, and allowed him absence for the day. Then away shot Dogdyke to transmute his notes to gold, to make such of them as survived the journey of a little higher value than they would be in a sister colony, and waited feverishly for the train. Next morning he was in Sydney, and having learned on inquiry that the Count had left the hotel, and had settled down in that bijou residence at Potts Point already known to us, he ventured to begin his inquiries.

The hotel waiter to whom he first appealed was sufficiently civil and communicative.

'The Count von Herder? Oh, he left this a long while ago. Gone into a house of his own. His pal, the gentleman as was always with him whilst he was in Sydney, Mr. David Whateley—what about him?'

'I don't think,' said Dogdyke, 'that that was the gentleman's name.'

That, the waiter averred, was certainly the

name of the Count's companion. Dogdyke respectfully thought not, but the man insisted. He had gone Home again by way of Melbourne, and the Count accompanied him, on the first stage of the journey, somewhere, so the waiter remembered, 'about the end of Febiwary.'

'Thank you,' said Dogdyke, meekly. 'Mr. David Whateley. Thank you.'

He made a memorandum of the name in a greasy little pocket-book, with an inch-long stump of pencil.

'You couldn't be sure, perhaps,' he ventured to suggest, 'of the exact date at which they left Sydney?'

'No,' the waiter replied, 'I couldn't. There was a constant coming and going of people in the hotel, and I couldn't tell to a day or two. It was somewhere about the end of Febiwary.'

The man was stupid and quite unsuspicious, very much disposed to converse, and evidently willing to tell anybody anything he knew.

Dogdyke drew no more from him, and hardly needed any more. The gentleman by the name of Johnson and Mr. David Whateley blended definitely into each other, and were one. The unreal General Mallard, whom Dogdyke had met in Collins Street, Melbourne, fused himself with this already united dual personality, and grew to be one and the same with them. Dogdyke took a little brandy and water by way of strengthening his resolve, and, having ascertained the direction in which the Count von Herder's new house was situated, walked boldly out to find it.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Mr. Dogdyke had no very great distance to travel, but, stoutly resolved as he was on setting out, he had ample time to undergo a score of nervous sinkings of the heart and many occasions to spur the sides of his own languishing interests. But at last he stood hesitatingly before the door of the house, and rang in a sudden access of desperation. The Count was in his power, he thought. Why should he fear him? It was the Count's place to tremble before Dogdyke, not Dogdyke's to tremble before the Count. Notwithstanding this inward declaration, he was exceedingly meek and propitiatory when the servant opened the door. He held a dirty card, bearing his own name, towards the servant, humbly, as if he feared that on con-

tact with the man's fingers the pasteboard might become electrified or explosive, and when the man had taken it in to his master he stood trembling before the magnificence of the hall. He could see at its far end, half revealed through rich velvet hangings, a pretty conservatory, in which a bird was singing. There was a great deal of gilding on the walls, and the place looked rather like the entrance to a theatre than a private house. Somewhat to his own amazement he found himself summoned to enter, and a moment later he stood in the presence of the enemy.

'The goot Dogdyke,' said Von Herder. He was lounging on the couch in the identical attitude and costume in which Denton had found him on the morning of his visit.

'The goot Dogdyke. And you wish to see me? Fery well, fery well. Close the door, Simmons.'

The man closed the door and disappeared, and the Count, lazily rolling over on to one side, surveyed Dogdyke with a smiling and

humorous perception of all his personal drolleries.

'And what,' he asked, 'can I do for the goot Dogdyke?'

'I am afraid, sir——' returned Dogdyke, hesitatingly.

'Why should the goot Dogdyke be afraid?' the Count demanded. 'You can sit town and make yourself comfortable.'

'I am afraid, sir——' Dogdyke began again.

'Fery well,' cried Von Herder, 'ton't be afraid. What is it?'

'I am afraid, sir,' said Dogdyke, taking up his parable for the third time, 'that what I have to say may not be actually——'

He hid his hands in his cuffs, made himself as small in his chair as possible, and indicated the completion of the phrase by a little contortion of the face.

'Well,' said the Count, 'perhaps it will not be actually—— Go on!'

'I am getting old,' said Dogdyke, 'and I

have got myself to take care of, and I am going to do it.'

'I am fery glat to hear it,' said the Count.

For a mere second his eyes lit up with a gleam which Dogdyke disrelished extremely. But an instant later he was once more so affable and smiling that the little man almost fancied that his eyes had played him false.

'You are going to take care of yourself? That is goot news. That is excellent news. In the meantime, my goot Dogdyke, you shall take care of *me*. Bring me, from the corner table behind you, a little cicar cabinet you will find there.'

Dogdyke obeyed.

'Thank you,' said the Count, selecting a cigar. 'And now, there are vestas on the chimney-piece. Thank you, again. Now I am at your tisposal.'

All this had, as it was meant to have, a certain effect upon Dogdyke. The old positions of patron and protected were at once

defined and re-established. Dogdyke was even humbler than he had been at the beginning, and yet the ice was partly broken.

'Yes, sir,' he said, when he had resumed his seat, 'I am going to take care of myself, and I think, sir, that you will be willing to help me.'

'So!' said the Count, 'you think that? So!'

'I presume, sir,' said Dogdyke, 'that you have heard the news about General Mallard?'

The Count looked at him lazily, blew a great cloud of smoke through his nostrils, and, having watched it curl away in the air, allowed his eyes to rest on Dogdyke.

'No,' he said, carelessly and idly. 'What is the news? Is it a matter of any interest to me?'

'I think so, sir,' said Dogdyke. 'I think you will find it is.'

'Vell,' the Count responded, 'it is fery kind of you to come and interest me. This

is the dull time of the tay with me. Talk, my goot Dogdyke, talk.'

'General Mallard, sir,' resumed Dogdyke, with inward quaking, but on the outside cooler and more dangerous to look at than he knew—'General Mallard has been the victim, sir, of a most outrageous fraud. He has been robbed of one hundred and twenty-four thousand pounds!'

'Pless my soul!' exclaimed the Count. 'That is a larch sum of money, eh, Dogdyke?'

'Yes, sir,' said Dogdyke, 'it is a large sum of money.'

His eyes travelled meaningly round the gaudy apartment, and he added: 'You can buy a lot of things with half that, sir.'

'I suppose so,' said the Count, rolling back into his original position.

Dogdyke hung fire a little. Now that he was face to face with the man, he could see no loophole in his armour, and it was wonderful to himself how the absolute certainty

he had held in his mind five minutes before seemed now to shrink and dwindle.

'Don't you think you are a little dull to-day, my goot Dogdyke?' asked the Count. 'You are kind enough to come here to entertain me. You were going to tell me something interesting. Why ton't you do it?'

'Well, sir,' said Dogdyke, in a more resolute tone than he had hitherto found courage for, 'it is a curious story, and I think you will be interested in it before I have——'

He waved his hands abroad in his own fashion to indicate conclusion, and then hid them in his coat-cuffs again.

'The money was got out of the Consolidated Colonial Bank at Melbourne on the 24th of February last. It was drawn by a person who was so extremely like General Mallard to look at that the manager of the bank could not tell the difference between them, and paid the money under the belief that he was paying it to the General himself, sir.'

'So?' inquired the Count.

Dogdyke, with all his furtive soul awake and his courage hysterically mounting within him, saw that his adversary was a trifle too cold and uninterested. He should, at least, have shown some curiosity to know why, if he were ignorant of this story, it should be brought to him.

'I really think, sir,' said Dogdyke, 'that I am going to be interesting now.'

'So?' said the Count again.

'Yes, sir: I really think I am, sir.'

It was bad policy to have warned the Count, since he desired to read in his face and manner that he had surprised him by the declaration he was about to make.

'The man who passed for General Mallard, sir, stopped at the Federal Coffee Palace under the name of Johnson.'

The Count turned round again at this, and hoisted himself lazily on one elbow, as if in expectation of the promised interest. His face revealed absolutely nothing.

'The gentleman by the name of Johnson, sir,' pursued Dogdyke, 'went off by train that night, I believe to Adelaide, sir, to catch the boat.'

This was only a guess, at which he had arrived by putting the hour of departure of the boat and the time fixed for the starting of the train together.

'Vell?' said the Count.

'I happened, sir,' continued the other, 'to leave Sydney by train on the 23rd of the month, and to see General Mallard on the platform there. He was saying good-bye to some friend, and I saw the train leave the station without him.'

'My goot Dogdyke,' Von Herder protested, falling back again into his first attitude, 'you are breaking your promise altogether. You told me you were going to be interesting.'

'I shall, sir, by-and-by,' returned Dogdyke. 'I saw General Mallard on the platform, and I saw the train start and leave him there. I was a little surprised to meet him in

Collins Street, Melbourne, next morning, sir.'

There the Count showed the first hint of interest.

'Oh, oh!' he said, turning his face once more to Dogdyke, and composing himself definitely to listen.

'Yes, sir, it was a little surprising, sir, wasn't it? Because, you see, there was only one train that could have got in there, and I saw with my own eyes he hadn't taken it. A man can't be in two places at once, even if he is a General in the army.'

He paused, but, meeting with no reply, went on.

'It struck me as being so queer, sir, that I watched the General. I saw him go into the Consolidated Colonial Bank. That was February 24, sir, the day on which the man who passed himself off as General Mallard drew the money.'

'Oh, oh!' cried the Count, 'I see. You haf a personal interest in this little matter.

You, so to speak, were behind the scenes. I see, I see.'

'Yes, sir,' said Dogdyke, 'I was behind the scenes. I waited, and I saw the General come out. He jumped into a cab and drove off. I saw another gentleman on the opposite side of the street, sir, and he got into a cab as well, and drove off in the same direction.'

Once more the Count rolled over on to his elbow, and there was no longer any pretence of want of interest in his face.

'I took a cab myself, sir,' continued Dogdyke. 'I thought the whole affair so very queer, that I wanted to see what I could about it.'

'Yes,' said the Count, as Dogdyke made one of his cringing pauses. 'Go on.'

'When the General got out of the cab, sir, he walked straight into the Occidental. He had done away with General Mallard's moustache, and General Mallard's limp, and General Mallard's eye-glass. The other gentleman paid both the cabs, sir, and went indoors.

They came out together some hours later, and I took the liberty of following them. They parted, sir, at the other end of Collins Street, and then in the evening the gentleman by the name of Johnson took the train.'

'That,' said the Count, mockingly, 'is a fery interesting finish to a fery peautiful story.'

'No, no, sir,' replied Dogdyke, 'we haven't come to the finish yet. When I saw the news in the day before yesterday's paper, sir, I put two and two together. I thought it worth my while to borrow money and come up to Sydney. I have been to the hotel the gentleman by the name of Johnson stayed in. You may happen to know, sir, that the other gentleman I spoke of stayed in the same place with him, and that whilst here, sir, he passed as a gentleman by the name of Whateley. I hope, sir,' he ventured to add, 'that I haven't disappointed you, and that, after all, you have found the narrative——'

He drew his hands from his coat-cuffs for

an instant, made a brief gesture with them, and returned them.

'Yes,' Von Herder assented, with a coolness which did him credit under the circumstances, 'I am teeply interested. You are a fery clefer and discerning person, Mr. Dogdyke.'

'Thank you, sir,' the little man responded.

'You are, of gourse, quite sure of all your facts?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And you are prepared in case of neet to swear to them in evidence?'

'Oh yes, indeed, sir.'

'Fery well, now,' said the Count; 'you thought it wiser, frentlier, and more kind and chentlemanly altogether, to come to me with this little narrative than to go elsewhere with it?'

'Well, sir,' returned Dogdyke, growing moment by moment more at ease, 'I didn't look at it altogether in that light, sir. I thought, perhaps, that it might be more——'

The Count filled up his pause for him.

'More profitable, eh? Is that the itea?'

'That, sir,' said Dogdyke, 'was the idea, since you are so kind as to help me to express it, sir.'

'You are a lucky man, my goot Dogdyke,' said the Count. 'You made a fery fortunate chourney on that day.'

'Yes, sir,' said Dogdyke, rubbing his hands beneath his coat-cuffs, and venturing on a timid smile. 'I think I did, sir.'

'I think you did,' said the Count. 'But now, my tear Dogdyke, admitting your goot fortune; admitting the beautiful acumen with which you haf followed up your case; admitting that the other chentleman, whose name you have with so much telicacy kept out of the case, is gompelled, as it were, to enter into partnership with you, you don't want to be too hart on him, eh?'

'No, sir,' returned Dogdyke, his heart dilating within him. 'Not too hard, sir.'

'Well,' said the Count, 'come! How shall we arranche matters? I will act for the other

chentleman; you shall act for yourself. Let me listen to your proposal.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Dogdyke, 'for mentioning it, but if you wouldn't mind my asking for it, I should like a glass of brandy to begin with.'

'Oplige me,' the Count responded, 'by ringing the bell.'

Dogdyke rose to obey, and permitted his features to crease themselves into a delighted and triumphant smile, as he turned his back upon the Count. The other, with the faintest indication of a movement to rise, cast upon him a glance so murderous and cruel that, if the little man had seen it, it would have frozen all the mirth and triumph out of his soul. When he had rung the bell and turned round again, Von Herder was placidly smiling and smoking, with one leg thrown loosely over the other, and his red morocco slipper dangling at the point of his toe. The servant entered. 'My goot frient, here, will take some refreshment,' said the Count. 'He vill tell you what to do.'

'I will take some brandy, and a little soda, please,' said Dogdyke. His manner to the servant was almost as deferential as to the Count himself. The man's subdued, yet splendid, livery had an effect upon him, and the very furniture of the room he sat in impressed his spirit.

The servant obeyed his orders, and he drank.

'My respects to you, Count von Herder.'

'Thank you, my goot Dogdyke, thank you,' the Count responded, preserving perfectly the sense of social difference between Dogdyke and himself, and the feeling of personal mastery on his own side.

'Now what do you propose to do next? Make me an offer.'

'I shouldn't like to press for anything unfair, sir,' said Dogdyke, grasping his glass in both hands, and leaning forward. 'But I think, sir, I might venture to come in for something rather——'

'Oh, yes,' the Count replied; 'I suppose

you must. I ton't at all like it, you know, Dogdyke; but it has to be made the pest of, and if you are not too extortionate I am sure the chentleman I represent will be fery pleased to oplige you. Go on now—or, perhaps it would be a little petter if you were to take time to think. I should fery strongly atvise you, in the interest of the person whom I may presume to call my glient, not to make too larch a claim. But suppose that I were to atvance you, on his pehalf, a little money now, and suppose that you were to make an offer to-morrow. Then, perhaps, we might consiter the question amicably together, and come to some arranchement. Just confine your attention to one question, I beg of you, my tear Dogdyke.'

'What question, sir?' Dogdyke asked.

'The question of how little you can take,' the Count returned. 'You haf displayed the finest acumen. In the language of the classics—the quotation is extremely common, and I haf no doubt you will recall it—you haf

touched with the point of the needle—*Rem acu tetigisti.* You teserve the greatest credit for your frientship and tiscretion, and all these matters shall be taken into consiteration; put be as chentle as you can, Dogdyke, be as chentle as you can.'

'Yes, sir,' said Dogdyke, sipping at the contents of the tall glass he held. 'I am not disposed to be too grasping. I should think I ought to make a pretty good thing out of it, though.'

'I ton't tispute that for a moment;' the Count replied, airily waving his cigar. 'Don't suppose that I tispute that at all, my tear Dogdyke. As you remarked, only a little while ago, you are an elterly man, and you are not in need of a great fortune. Something eminently respectable can be done for you, and if I may fenture to speak for my glient, and I think I can'—the Count laughed at this, with an aspect of joviality—'I may fenture to assure you that the thing will be arranched with little

trouble. If you have any momentary need, Dogdyke——'

'I haven't fifty shillings in the world,' said Dogdyke.

'Ah, vell, vell!' cried the Count, 've much chance that: ve must chance that! I ton't care at this minute, for atmirable reasons which a man of your pusiness instincts, my tear Dogdyke, will at once recocnise—I ton't care to offer you a cheque. It will be petter, I think, on all accounts, to hand over reaty money. If you will, for a moment, excuse me, my goot frient, I will see what I haf in the house.'

He swaggered to the door, and with his hand on the handle turned to Dogdyke, with jovial sweeping burlesque bow, and so withdrew.

The little man seized the decanter which the servant had left upon the table, poured a portion of its contents into the half-empty glass, and tossed off the draught. Then he rubbed his hands, and beamed.

Assuredly he had never dreamed that he would be able so easily to overcome an adversary so formidable. Every lying word the Count had spoken, every compliment he had offered to his astuteness, was like honey to him.

At last, at last, by his own wit, he had found the way to competence; no more labour, no more dry drudgery at the desk's dead wood, no more short commons, no more shabby raiment bought at second-hand, no more stint in the way of food and drink, no more seedy lodgings and tempestuous landladies, watchfully urgent for payment. The latter days of life were smoothed for him. He had a fortune in his hand, and by that curious flattering of the will which assails criminals of every class, the Count had been enabled to tell him that he had made his fortune honestly and honourably. He had defrauded nobody, he had plucked the rascally foreigner of a part of his ill-gotten gains, and in his own mind he shone, for the

moment, in the brandified glow which inspired him, as the chastiser of the wicked.

The Count came back, swinging a cash-box in one hand and jingling a bunch of keys in the other. He closed the door behind him with a burlesque gesture of secrecy, laying his fingers on his lips, and smilingly indicated the possible presence of a listener outside.

'I ton't know how much I haf here, my goot Dogdyke,' he said, 'and you must not strip me bare. You haf tone so fery well, that I am really proud to succumb to you.' He laid the box upon the table, unlocked it with his flourishing swagger, and threw it open. 'Let me see.'

He fluttered out a note or two and a little handful of gold.

'I haf here, all told, but seven and fifty pounts, my goot Dogdyke. Suppose we halve that for the moment, eh?'

'Yes, sir,' said Dogdyke, 'that will do very nicely.'

'It will do charmingly for me,' the Count

exclaimed, clapping his hand on Dogdyke's shoulder; 'if it does for you at all, it will do for me telightfully.'

Dogdyke took the money counted out for him, and whipped it into his pocket.

'Shall I call to-morrow?'

'Think it over, my tear Dogdyke. Formulate your wishes; send them to me in writing. I will gif you an appointment.'

'I trust, sir,' said Dogdyke, 'there will be no attempt to evade me.'

'Now,' the Count responded, 'for a chentleman of your acuteness that is rather a foolish question. It is safe to stay and divite, and if I choose to be greedy and to run away it would be—eh?—not.'

'Yes, sir,' said Dogdyke, 'that would be very unsafe indeed.'

CHAPTER XXXVIII

'Tom, dear,' said Mrs. Barton, 'I want to have a long and serious talk with you.'

Tom had just come in on foot from his business offices, and was more than a trifle hot and dusty. Except in the great summer heats, he would have nothing to say to the carriage, and made a point of walking to and from business.

'All right, my darling,' he responded; 'I'll get a bit of a sluice and be down to you directly. It's nothing very serious, I hope?'

'Well, it is serious,' his wife replied, smilingly, 'but nothing to be afraid of.'

'All right,' said Tom; 'I'll be back directly, and we'll go into it, whatever it is.'

He dashed upstairs three steps at a time, for in spite of advancing years he retained a

rare boyish impetuosity, and his wife sat down and awaited his return. After a lapse of some four or five minutes, however, she lost patience, and ascending to her husband's room, she rapped at the door.

'May I come in?'

'Half a minute,' Tom responded, and then, after a second or two, 'Come in.'

She entered.

'What is it, old lady? You are looking quite anxious. Let's have it out at once. Sit down, and talk to me whilst I finish dressing.'

'Well, Tom,' said Mrs. Barton, 'I have been talking to Mr. Denton all the afternoon, and I've got a notion, which I think you might carry out for me. I'll tell you what it is, and then you'll have to see if you can afford to do it.'

'Money?' said Tom, pausing with rather a quizzing look, and glancing down at her with the comb stuck in the middle of his great beard.

'Yes,' she said, 'it's money.'

'All right,' said Tom; 'you have never been an unreasonable woman, Mary, and I think you may go ahead with a light heart.'

'But, Tom, it's a great deal of money—it's a very great deal of money.'

'Well, well, old lady, drive ahead. What have you been talking to Denton about?'

'He's been telling me all about poor General Mallard's losses,' she replied. 'Everything's gone to utter crash and ruin with him. It seems that the poor man has always been a great speculator, and, apart from the stock he was robbed of, he hasn't anything that isn't a dreadful loss and expense to him. Except for the old Abbey, he's quite a pauper.'

'That's hard lines,' Tom answered. 'That upstart old father of his was reckoned to be a wealthy man.'

'The General's always been a bad man of business, so Mr. Denton tells me,' said his wife. 'He's made haste to be rich, and fallen into a snare, Tom.'

'Yes, my dear,' said Tom, struggling into his coat. 'That's the way with a good many of 'em. But there's many a sound big concern that would be knocked into matchwood by the loss of such a sum as one hundred and twenty thousand pounds.'

'Well, there's the fact, Tom. The General's going to sell the poor old Abbey, and the whole estate. You remember, dear——' She paused there, laying a hand on one of his, and looking at him.

'Remember?' he asked her, doubtfully. 'I seem to remember most things that ever happened in my time in the old place; I think of them pretty often. What is it you want me to remember?'

'The Barton Farm is part of the estate, Tom.'

'Oh!' he said, with great solemnity. 'I see.'

'I thought you would, dear,' said his wife. 'I thought you'd understand at once.'

He took his beard in his big hands, and

looked at her thoughtfully for a minute or two. Then a light began to dawn in his eyes, and by-and-by he was smiling broadly.

'Yes,' he said, slowly, 'that'd set the General on his feet again, wouldn't it? And it wouldn't make a bad wedding present for Michael.'

'My dear,' she said, clasping both hands and rising, 'that's the very thing I thought of, only—not for Michael, Tom.'

'Not for Michael? No?' Tom answered, with a puzzled look. 'But who for, if not for Michael?'

She put her arm round his neck, and laid her cheek against his shoulder after a girlish fashion she had never lost. 'Why not for Michael's wife, Tom?' she half whispered.

'Upon my word, dear,' Tom declared, 'you're the cleverest woman in a million. That's the idea, to be sure. Why not for Michael's wife?'

'You can afford it, Tom?' she asked.

'Well, yes,' he answered, with a short,

sturdy laugh, 'I think I can afford it. Everything comes to Michael at the finish, of course—that goes without saying. I can spare him that, and spare it pretty easily.'

'What do you think it will run to, Tom? You used to know pretty much about the value of land in those parts, didn't you?'

'I can't say, offhand,' her husband answered, 'but I'll go into it. Nobody expects to be paid on the nail for a transaction like that. It will take some months, at the quickest, to find the purchase money; but I'll see about it at once. You're sure it is to be sold?'

'Oh, yes; Mr. Denton told me so quite plainly. The General has wired to-day to put it on the market.'

'All right,' said Tom. 'I'll ask Denton to recommend me to a good man in England, and he shall have instructions by wire to-morrow.'

'No, Tom,' she besought him again. 'I want you to humour me in this. I don't

want anybody to know about it but our two selves, until it's done. Nobody among ourselves, I mean. Go to your own lawyer, Tom; he'll do everything for you.'

'You want it to come as a surprise?' he asked.

'Yes,' she said, 'I want it to come as a surprise. And, you know, I think, Tom, that if you can offer the Abbey as the girl's dowry, it might break the old gentleman's pride down.'

Tom considered this idea for a minute, then gave his wife a hug and a kiss, and broke out in eulogy:

'I don't believe there ever was a woman with such a headpiece. That's the best idea you ever had.'

'Ah!' she answered, 'but where's the husband as would do such a thing for the asking?'

'Why, here he is,' cried Tom, with a sounding blow on his own broad chest.

'But where else is he?' she insisted.

'I don't know, my dear,' said Tom, with a certain dryness. 'I'll just go and speak a word through the telephone,' he added, 'and get Miller to come up and have a talk about it to-night. Strike while the iron's hot.'

'You don't mean to say,' she asked, 'that there's any danger of its cooling?'

'No,' said Tom, with his old-fashioned Black-country drawl in full play, 'not much danger o' that, I fancy. But it happens just at this minute I see my way to loosenin' a goodish bit o' money. I was half in the mind to do it yesterday, but I determined to abide a while. Now there's a reason for it, I'll begin the thing to-night.'

Denton sat in his own room, reading and making notes, whilst this interview was in progress. He was engaged in securing matter for a solid legal treatise which he meant to be the coping-stone of the literary side of his life, and he was working, as he always did, with an intense eagerness and application. He was so perfectly immersed in his own thoughts

that Hawthorne, rapping at the door, had to repeat his summons twice or thrice before he was heard.

Receiving permission at last to enter, he walked in with an air of secrecy very unusual to him, closed the door behind him, and drew a seat near that of his old guardian.

'Do I interrupt?' he asked.

'As a matter of fact, you do,' said Denton. 'But I have done work enough for one day.'

He marked his place in the volume he had been annotating, pushed it away and yawned, with outstretched feet and hands, as if he would have gone to pieces.

'Now,' he said, apparently much refreshed, 'what can I do for you?'

'You remember,' said Hawthorne, 'the conversation you had with my mother and myself this afternoon just after luncheon?'

'Perfectly,' said Denton.

'General Mallard is really ruined by the losses he has suffered?'

'Stone broke,' said Denton.

'And compelled to sell the Abbey?'

'And compelled to sell the Abbey.'

'Then,' said Hawthorne, 'I want you to help me in a matter of business. I shall buy the place. I suppose that land in England is not a very good investment just now?'

'Among the least profitable in the world,' Denton answered. 'Except in the large towns, the value of land is sinking everywhere.'

'I mean to buy, all the same,' said Hawthorne, 'and I mean to give a pretty generous price.'

Denton nodded attentively, but for the moment gave no answer.

'I want you to advise me in the matter,' Hawthorne pursued; 'and I want you, if you will, to take the whole transaction on your shoulders. I don't want my name to appear in it, and I don't want the buyer's name to be known until the transaction is completed.'

'Very well,' returned the barrister, 'that

can be arranged simply enough, but the estate will cost a pretty penny. You will have to make arrangements to raise the money.'

'Shall I leave all that to you?' asked Hawthorne. 'I am sorry you have made me so poor a man of business.'

'Yes,' Denton answered, readily enough, 'I'll undertake the matter. I suppose you want it seen to at once?'

'As soon as you can set to work.'

'Good,' returned Denton; 'I know the very man for it, and I'll see him to-morrow.'

These double plots brought about a curious conjunction of circumstances, for here were three people in the same city who might, at any hour, have met in the same room and practically concluded their business without expense or trouble, all working without knowledge of each other, and communicating in a roundabout fashion through their respective men of business by means of telegraphic messages which made half the circuit of the globe. In two or three days General

Mallard learned that there were two purchasers in the field, and was advised that each seemed eager. His prospects seemed to brighten under this intelligence. The one dread the poor gallant old soldier had was lest he should fail to meet his engagements, and the prospect of the immediate sale of the Abbey and the estates round it seemed to remove that fear into the far distance. Of course, Mallard's English man of business made the best of the rivalry, and played the two purchasers off one against the other. He did this to such good effect indeed that, taking into consideration the state of the land market at that time, he succeeded in recouping the General for at least one-half of his losses by the gigantic fraud from which he had suffered.

Of course, one of the secret disputants was bound to win in the end, and since each was determined, at any cost not altogether beyond reason, to secure the property, the duel might have been indefinitely protracted but for an accident.

Tom Barton was resolved to have the old house as a dower for his future daughter-in-law, and at the same time as the most powerful bribe he could think of for the General.

Michael was determined to secure for Clara the house in which she had been born and bred, and the lands which she had been taught from infancy would one day be her own. Each was equally eager and determined, and each was a little annoyed by the pertinacity of the unknown contestant on the other side. The keen man of business in London felt the pulse of each through the agents who worked for them in London along the wire, and, as has been said already, he succeeded in securing a price at least 12 per cent. better than the actual monetary value of the land would have justified him in asking. It would have gone higher yet, and probably a good deal higher, but for the fact that Denton acted for Hawthorne whilst Tom Barton acted for himself. Tom was his own principal, and a great deal more energetic

and impetuous than Denton, so that it happened that Michael, having gone away up country to a distant station beyond the reach of the telegraph wire, and having been absent for a day or two beyond his appointed time, his adviser awaited him, and when he returned the battle was over.

'They wanted another twenty thousand,' the old barrister explained, when Hawthorne came back again, 'and since I did not feel justified in making so large an advance without your consent, I wired: "Principal absent, cable in week." Now, it seems, they have closed with the other purchaser, and the thing's over.'

Hawthorne was bitterly distressed, for he had set his heart on the gift. But Tom, who knew no reason for his son's chagrin, was secretly elated, and talked the matter over with his wife with some glee and satisfaction.

'I suppose,' he said, 'some cotton-spinning fellow wanted it, or some chap who would

make money on the Stock Exchange, as the first of the Mallards did. They say, my dear, that it takes three generations to make a gentleman. I should like to remind the old General of that. His three generations are only reached in his daughter, and, for all so proud as he is of his family, Michael's only one generation behind him. They'll be settled as county gentry, my dear, when you and me are dead and gone.'

'I don't mind about their being county gentry, Tom,' his wife answered, 'so long as they're good and happy.'

'Well, I do,' Tom answered, solidly. 'I want them to be good and happy just as much as you do, but I believe in the county gentry, and I always have. It makes me proud and happy, after all I've gone through, to think that my lad's on a level with Sir Ferdinand. If he likes to go into Parliament, my dear—I've talked all this over with Denton many a time—he might be "my lord" before he dies, and I like to think of it. Every

family has got to have a beginning, and in a hundred years' time there will be a Lord Hawthorne in the middle of old England. He'll hold up his head with the best of em. They'll give him a crest and a motto,' cried Tom, laughing at the fancy, 'and forerunners going back as far as William the Conqueror. They won't carry the arms of Van Diemen's Land, you bet, and they won't know as the founder of the race ever set foot there. Old Denton's buried that, my dear, and I did well to take his advice about it.'

'But, Tom,' cried his wife, 'you speak as if the marriage was settled already.'

'So it is,' Tom declared. 'I'm going to have a talk with Mallard. The girl's willing, and so is Michael. I never was for letting the old folks spoil the young folks' chances of being happy. I'm not that way now. I shall give the General a piece of my mind. "Look here, General, here's your ancestral hall back again, a wedding gift to your daughter. She'll take it and be glad to get it. Not

because of itself, but because it's brought to her by the man she loves, and they're going to live in it together. The lad's as honest as the day, as good a lad as ever lived, and as handsome a lad into the bargain." I won't tell the General as his own father wheeled a fish-barrow. He did, though. And I won't tell him mine was respectable and well-to-do at the same time; but I will tell him this: You talk about sacrifices. Very well, then I'll talk about sacrifices. We've found our lad again, his poor old mother and me. We've got him back to our hearts, and he knows us.'

His voice began to shake a little, but he went on sturdily:—

'We've got him back. He knows us. It's the longing of his heart and ours that we should be together. He's willing to take back the name that his father never brought disgrace on, and lift it back into honest fame again, and we say: No; go your way, live and be happy in your own fashion. Your old

mother and your old dad don't cast you off, but they send you away to the other side of the world, and say good-bye to you for good and all—for your own sake, lad, and the sake of the girl you are going to marry.'

CHAPTER XXXIX

If Dogdyke, earlier in the day, had glowed with exultation in his belief that he saw his fortune clear before him, he experienced an almost delirious triumph when he left the Count's house that afternoon. He had more immediate money in his pockets than he had owned for many months past. He had had no such sum in his possession since he had last beguiled Mrs. Barton into the belief that he had lighted upon a business enterprise which, at an original outlay of fifty pounds, would lead him to fortune for the remainder of his days; and as he walked he fingered the coin in one pocket and the notes in another, with the reviving sense of triumph and delight. This was not all. He had not only money to start with in hand, but he had

frightened the Count von Herder. He had conquered that apparently impregnable fortress. He had scaled its heights, nobody but himself could tell with what a fluttering and despairing heart; and to his own profound astonishment he had found the flag struck before him, and he stood there an admitted conqueror.

But poor Dogdyke of late years had been taught by many circumstances and many people to think poorly of himself. He had been bullied and browbeaten and derided and made light of in a thousand places, and now, by an unbelievable stroke of good fortune, he had been able to attain an ascendency over the one man he had thought unconquerable. It was delightful. It was a tonic to his soul, and a balm for every wound his self-respect had received these many painful and degraded years. His ordinary mean shuffle had to his own apprehension changed for something like a triumphal march. He tried to square his shoulders and lift his head,

but a street boy laughed at the quaint comedy of his strut, and he drew himself back into his shell again. The villainous side of the transaction in which he had so recently and so successfully engaged never appealed to him even for a moment. Providence had been good to him, that was all.

That he himself was acting criminally never occurred to him. He was taking just and legitimate advantage of a little bit of information providentially thrown in his way, and partly by accident, partly by his own astuteness, and partly by his own courage, he was going as a result to be rich for the remainder of his days. He saw champagne before him in dozens of magnums, cigars of the best brand. He even beheld in fancy his own mean figure clothed gloriously like the Count's own, and personal pride, long dead within him, woke again. His mind revelled in the contemplation of a thousand vanities, and for an hour or two he was as happy as he knew how to be.

On his side the Count von Herder was less excellently content, but he was by no means so downcast as Dogdyke in his own delighted mind supposed. The Count had crossed steel with many opponents in his day. Some of them had forced him to respect them, one or two had fairly beaten him by mere force of circumstances, others he had despised. But he had never had so pure and complete a despite for any adversary as he had for Dogdyke.

'He supposes,' said the Count to himself, with an admirable complacency, as he chose and lit a new cigar, 'the poor thing supposes that he is a match for me. Ve shall see. I am really afrait that in one way or another I shall have to be tangerous to the poor Dogdyke. That would be something of a pity; but if it must be, it must be.'

He laughed to think of the simplicity of the man who could suppose him conquered in a single turn of the hand, and could imagine that, because he had drawn from him one

little instalment of money, he had secured hold enough to possess himself of a considerable fortune.

'You will nefer get your thirty thousand pounts, Dogdyke, nefer!' he said to himself, as he lay on his couch and watched the light fumes from his cigar. 'I can afouch that for you. You will nefer get your thirty thousand pounts!'

He lay tranquilly smoking until he had finished his cigar, and then, glancing at a little clock on the mantelpiece, rose with a sudden look of resolution, walked briskly from the room to his own bedchamber, and there rang for his valet.

With his assistance he attired himself with an even unusual care, and then, having ordered out the superb victoria he had recently purchased, was driven to the house of Mrs. Vincent. That excellent woman was at home, and alone. There was a reception that afternoon at Government House, and to a gubernatorial reception goeth all the world,

and sometimes the pedigreed of Potts Point are known to be bitter about the mixed nature of the gatherings, at which it is possible that even one's tailor may intrude himself between the wind and one's nobility. The very Governor recognises the truly democratic character of the colonies, and makes amends to the injured in a hundred little ways. The Count von Herder had left his card at Government House, and had secured a card of invitation. He had therefore begged permission to escort Mrs. Vincent, and that good, simple person, not altogether unflattered by the attention, had accepted that arrangement. It was distinctly known that Von Herder was not a bogus nobleman, like some who might, with no advantage to anybody, be called to memory, and it was pleasant to her to associate on familiar terms with titled people.

'Tear matam,' said Von Herder, on being introduced to the dining-room, 'I am afrait that I have called at an inopportune moment.

But I did not know that you would lunch so late to-day. The reception is announced for two o'clock.'

'For two o'clock!' cried the lady. 'Rubbish!'

'Inteet!' said the Count, smilingly upholding his contention.

'Look again,' returned Mrs. Vincent, 'you'll find you're wrong. Three o'clock, and quite early enough, too. I shan't dream of going near for a good two hours.'

'You are cruel, matam,' urged Von Herder, 'to deprive the kathering of your presence for so long a time.'

'Oh, you foreigners!' said Mrs. Vincent, lifting her fat hand and breaking into laughter. 'You're all alike.'

'Are ve so?' the Count demanded.

'Well, I don't know about all,' the lady replied, 'but all I've ever come across have developed flatterers. There was one used to visit next door to where I lived, and used to go on horrid with the girls, talkin' the wildest

kind o' nonsense to 'em. He was a Portugee and lived at Camberwell. French polish was his line.' Count von Herder supposed this to relate to the forms of politeness adopted by the Camberwell Portuguese. 'Finally,' pursued Mrs. Vincent, 'he stabbed an organ man in Hatton Garden, and there was an end of his fine speeches. That's what all his flatteries ended in.'

'Ah! Mrs. Vincent,' cried the Count, closing the palms of his hands together and smiling tenderly over the tips of his fingers, 'it is not the flatterer who is in tanger of stapping anypody in this case. Ve are all in tanger of being stapped by those pright eyes.'

'Oh-h-h!' cried Mrs. Vincent, 'go along, do! Oh! if ever I heard!' But she laughed and blushed and bridled a little, and perhaps was neither so much shocked nor so surprised as she made pretence of being. Is a harmless, simple vanity to die out (at something under forty) in the female breast? Or the male, either? All good things forefend! 'Have a

glass of wine, Count,' pursued the hospitable lady, when she had paid the proper tribute to her visitor's compliment. 'Do. There's a pint of Heidsieck not five minutes opened, and only half a glass poured out. Now, don't say no. You might just as well as let it be wasted amongst the servants, and they get more than their share a'ready, I can tell you. I never have more than a sip o' champagne at lunch-time, because I always like a drop o' good port with the crumb of cheese at the finish, and too much wine at midday ain't good for a person of a full habit o' body.'

'I will take a class of wine,' said the Count, 'with the fery greatest pleasure, and I will drink it to the health and brosberity of my peautiful hostess.'

'Now, Count,' said the lady, 'if you go on like that I shall run away.'

'No,' said the Count, 'you will not be so gruel to the least deserving of your atmirers.'

'My word!' said Mrs. Vincent. 'I do declare you're worse than ever. I don't want

to be rude, but I don't know what on earth made you come so early. I shall have to go away and get ready a'most d'rec'ly, and I don't know what you'll do with yourself.'

'Matam,' the Count responded, thinking that this time he saw an actual challenge to a compliment. 'I shall have neet of all my strength of mind to enture your absence.'

'Oh, bother!' said the widow, laughing, with a simulated pettishness which was, perhaps, a shade too girlish even for a lady who was something under forty. 'Don't go on like that, Count, or I shall re'ly be obliged to ring.'

'Matam,' said the Count, 'I am your humple servant, and opey your lightest wort. But you cannot rop me of my eyes, nor of my heart, nor of my thoughts.'

'You can smoke if you like to go into the lib'ary,' Mrs. Vincent answered, when she had despatched the final crumb of cheese, and emptied her glass with a relish which seemed to lose nothing from the presence of

the complimentary foreigner. 'I am going upstairs for a good hour and a half. Or, if you like, you can smoke in the garden.'

'I am forbidden to sbeak my thoughts,' said Von Herder; 'but if you could read here——' He laid his gloved hand on his padded breast and bowed, creasing his fat cheeks into a most killing smile.

'Ah!' cried the buxom widow, bouncing to her feet and spreading out her florid personal decorations with the palms of both fat hands. 'I suppose there's quite the usual amount of nonsense there.'

She was shrewd enough in her way, and she meant this when she said it, and yet the ogling attitudinisings of the Count had a certain weight and volume with her, too. He was certainly a fine figure of a man, the Count, and he was undeniably a man of more polish and address, or at least more daring in compliment, than most of the Potts Point gentlemen. The foreigner's compliments might not be absolutely sincere, but at all events they were

pleasant to listen to, and when all was said there was no harm in a little bit of civility. And then Mrs. Vincent had come of a class which does not mince either its commendations or their opposites.

'I tare not as yet tell you,' the Count replied, 'how much of sincerity I speak with. One of these tays I may fenture.'

The widow's heart turned gently over at this speech with an ineffable, fluttered complacency of sensation. She had not known this fat, smiling, complimentary foreigner long, and he made an impression upon her—a distinct impression.

'Are you goin' to wait,' she asked, 'or shall you call again?'

'Can you ask me?' the Count demanded. 'I shall stay, if I may haf that happiness.'

'Very well,' said the widow, and sailed towards the door.

The Count opened it for her, and bowed low as she passed, with his smiling face turned up towards her. In that rather over-

strained attitude, with stooping shoulders and upturned head, his collar choked him a little, so that his face became inflamed, and the whites of his eyes were suffused with red. This made the flattering, affectionate ogle somewhat grim to look at; but the widow was not in the mood to notice a trifle of this sort, and skimmed by him in a tender fear.

'The most tevoted of your servants, tear matam,' he murmured, as she went by. He straightened himself as he closed the door behind her and rubbed his hands together, with the air of a man well pleased with himself. Then he moved to the table, poured out and drank a glass of champagne, and next examined himself critically in the mirror over the chimney-piece. He was lavender colour again all over, and felt himself attired to a nicety. He postured for a moment or two, and even went so far as to mount a chair to assure himself, by the aid of a looking-glass, that his trousers were immaculate in

fit; but, hearing a step in the corridor, he skipped nimbly down in time to avoid the observation of a decorous man-servant, who came to guide him to the library, if he should choose to wait there.

He chose to wait there, and the servant brought him an excellent cigar and a cup of fragrant coffee. The dead Vincent's old friends still occasionally made calls at the house which had once been his, and the widow kept up all the ancient traditions of hospitality. There was no better tobacco to be had in Sydney, and the Count, as he disposed himself carefully in such wise as in no way to ruffle his raiment, and pulled at his cigar, felt that he had lighted upon pleasant places. He was not the man to enter upon a matrimonial speculation without having made some inquiries of a business nature.

The good Vincent's will was accessible, and he had consulted it, so that he knew exactly what weight of fortune the widow carried. He thought, and perhaps rightly,

that the matrimonial vessel, when anchored to fifteen thousand pounds per annum, was less likely to slip its cable and drive to ports unknown, than it might be if fastened only to the shifting sands of mere affection. He had not come two hours before his time for nothing, and he was not in the least prepared to allow any interloper to walk in between himself and the widow. He was there to forestall any attempt of that kind.

His own thoughts occupied him not unpleasantly until the announcement reached him that the lady of the house was ready, and he was ushered into the drawing-room, where he found her in company with two other ladies, both of whom were splendidly overdressed, though neither of them was comparable to the hostess. The Count was introduced to each of them, and was smilingly received. Then the carriage was announced, and they were all driven away to Government House.

The Count looked meaningly at the widow

as if to indicate that his gloved hand, which lay in the neighbourhood of his heart, was there to signify a certain tumult in that organ. Mrs. Vincent smiled at her own silk-clad knees. Her too-rosy features grew rosier yet, and she bridled with pleasure. The Count was eminently conversational, and made himself extremely agreeable to the ladies in general, but he reserved all intimacies of glance and tone for the late Mr. Vincent's widow, and the late Mr. Vincent's fifteen thousand pounds per annum. Even in the throng itself the Count contrived to continue his attentions, and he found his advances so flatteringly received that he ventured to make them more and more marked in character.

CHAPTER XL

'MICHAEL, my lad,' said Tom Barton, 'how much longer do you mean to stay shilly-shallying? You've had such a chance as a young fellow with a father-in-law agin him doesn't often get. Don't you think it's about time you moved?'

'What chance had I, sir?' Hawthorne asked him.

'Chance!' cried Tom; 'chance enough. There was the old chap without a farthing, or pretty near it. You've money enough, to be certain, and you've set your heart on the young lady. Why didn't you buy in the estate when it was in the market, and make a present of it to the old gentleman? That would have softened his heart, I bet.'

Hawthorne looked curiously at his father

and hesitated. 'Well,' he said, 'it's rather odd, that, to me. I tried to do it.'

'You—tried to do it?' cried Barton.

'Yes,' returned Hawthorne. 'Denton undertook the business, but you remember that I went away up country just at that time. In my absence Denton didn't care to act, and the thing slipped out of his fingers.'

'Denton?' cried Tom. 'Denton let the thing slip out of his fingers?' He slapped both his knees and laughed long and loud. Hawthorne naturally saw no particular reason for mirth, but the passion of Tom's merriment was not easily appeased. He broke out into peal after peal, rising and stamping about the room, and sitting down to recover from the exhaustion of laughter. There were tears in his eyes when at last he calmed down again. 'Denton!' he repeated half a dozen times—'Denton let it slip through his fingers, did he?'

'You seem amused,' said Hawthorne,

rather ruefully. 'For my own part I was very much disappointed.'

'Never mind, lad, never mind,' cried Tom, slapping him on the shoulder; 'don't be down-hearted. You don't happen to know who it was as bought the property against you?'

'No, sir,' said Hawthorne, 'I never heard.'

Tom went into a new shriek of laughter, and came out of it with the old exclamation:—

'Denton!—fancy his letting it slip through his fingers! Fancy Denton being beaten! I shall have a laugh at Denton all my days.'

To his own thinking, he had never met with so rich a jest in all his life. That he and his son had been playing at cross purposes in this matter was sufficiently ludicrous in itself; but that he, in opposition to Denton, should have gained his point, was altogether delightful to him. It was a keener and more exquisite pleasure by far to

know that he had done the very thing for which his boy himself was prepared to make a sacrifice.

'Wait here a minute, my lad,' he cried; 'I'll be back directly, and then I shall have something to say to you.' He slapped Hawthorne once more boisterously upon the shoulder and turned to go; in the same instant he faced round again, taking his son by both shoulders, and shook him in a strong, passionate grasp. 'God bless thee, lad!' he said, with a sudden huskiness in his voice, and so walked swiftly from the room. A minute later he had found Mary, who sat tranquilly sewing in her own room.

'My dear,' he said, with an air of exaggerated secrecy, his big voice subdued to a rumbling murmur, 'you've hit the nail on the head. I told you at the time it was the cleverest thing you ever thought about.'

'What do you mean, Tom?'

He was so particularly emphatic, and at the same time his manner was so mysterious,

that she knew not what to make of him. His solemnity and mystery broke at once into renewed laughter.

'We've beaten old Denton—think of that, my darling!' Then, with nods and winks and confidential nudges beyond counting, he told his story. 'There was Michael wanting to buy the estate, my darling, and make a present of it to the old General. There was him keeping it a secret from his old father and mother, and them two doing the same thing, don't you see, and keeping it a secret from him. Why, it's better fun than a Christmas pantomime, and I've beaten Denton. The old gentleman will never get over it so long as he lives. I shall have a joke against him to his dying day.'

'Have you told Michael?' asked his wife.

'No,' he cried, beaming, with a long-drawn note of repudiation on the tone. 'He'll find out by-and-bye. I have got my plan.'

'What is it?' she asked.

'I am going to march right off to the General at this hour,' he answered. 'I'm going to take Michael with me. I'm going to have it out without any loss of time, and I think I know which way it will go. There's that rascal of a Von Herder quieted. There's Dogdyke provided for. The thing's all in the family. I don't think with such a bribe as I've got to offer him that the old gentleman is going to give us a very great deal of trouble. He is almost certain to be at home at this time of day; and anyhow, Michael and me will go up together and see if we can't get a look at him.'

Mary bade him 'God speed,' and stayed behind, with such thoughts and hopes as only mothers have. Half her heart seemed bound up in the boy's love affairs, and she waited anxiously to learn the result of the expedition.

Tom, burly and handsome in his dress of ceremony, broke in on Hawthorne ten minutes later, and bade him get ready for a stroll. The young man had grown so far accustomed

to his father's ways as to be sure that the white waistcoat and frock-coat, the silk hat and gloves, were only donned at moments of extreme social importance, and wondered a little what was in the wind. He was soon attired for out-of-doors himself, and joined Tom, asking nothing so far. The elder man carried in his hand a letter, which he waved from moment to moment with a certain emphasis, striking it at times smartly on the palm of the other hand, and he bore himself altogether with so pronounced an air of triumph and resolve, that Michael marvelled at him more and more.

As Barton led him nearer to the General's house, be began to define in part the meaning of the expedition; but it was not until his father laid a hand upon the swing gate that he was actually certain of their destination.

'You intend to call upon General Mallard?' he asked.

'Ain't it pretty evident, my boy?' said Barton, genially. There was a tenderness in

voice and face, and with it mixed a certain exultation.

'My lad,' he added, 'there's nothing certain in this world, but I think I'm going to put things straight for you. At any rate, you're going to see that the old man hasn't been unmindful of your interests.'

'That,' Hawthorne answered, 'I am sure of always.'

'Come inside,' said Tom. 'Let's beard the lion—let's have it over. I think I've got a little trifle for him here.'

Their names were sent in to General Mallard, and for a while they were left waiting.

'How long is it,' Tom asked in a whisper, 'since you saw the young lady?'

'I saw her yesterday,' Michael answered.

'You have been meeting pretty often, eh?'

'Constantly.'

'And you have written to one another, of course?'

'Almost day by day,' the young man answered, with a transient blush.

'And she sticks to you?'

'Oh, yes.'

'And you to her?'

'As long,' said Hawthorne, 'as there's a breath in my body.'

'Then I think it's straight,' said Tom.

He drew from its envelope the letter he had carried with so triumphant a flourish through the streets, and read it twice or thrice over in silence, wearing now a serious, now a brilliant look. 'Yes, my lad,' he said when he folded it up at length and returned it to its covering, 'I think we shall do.'

The General entered, polite and formal, and requested his visitors to be seated. He remained standing, however, and they copied his example.

'To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?' asked Mallard, in his stiffest manner.

'Why, sir,' said Tom, squaring his broad

shoulders, and setting his hands behind his back with a strong grasp on either elbow, 'I think it's about time we came to a resolution.'

'I need not tell you, Mr. Barton,' Mallard answered, 'that I arrived at my conclusion long ago. I may tell you, however, now, that I find no reason for departing from it.'

'Perhaps, sir,' said Barton, 'I may be able to find you two or three.'

The General bowed stiffly, but returned no other answer. Barton groped in his coat pocket, and drew from it two documents. 'Here,' he said, handing them to the General, 'you'll find an original and a copy. There's the official statement of my son's birth, and in it you'll find my unhappy rank at the time that event happened. There's a copy of it.'

'Well?' said the General.

'Mr. Denton extracted these,' said Tom, 'from Count von Herder. It's no secret, I believe—for all Sydney seems to know it—that Count von Herder is going to marry

Mrs. Vincent. She's got fourteen or fifteen thousand a year, and he doesn't want to blackmail anybody any longer. Besides that, Denton's got a hold on him, and he'll be quiet. Nobody else knows anything at all about the matter, except that wretched little Dogdyke, the fellow I found here when I first called on you about this business. I found him employment in Melbourne, and he's been away these two months. There's no fear of his turning up again, and for his own sake he'll keep his tongue between his teeth.'

'Permit me,' said the General; 'the matter is not of the faintest moment to myself, but as a matter of fact, Mr. Dogdyke is not in Melbourne.'

Tom stared at him with wide-open eyes.

'Not in Melbourne?'

'Certainly not,' said the General; 'the man is in Sydney at this hour. I saw him yesterday morning in the city. I regret to add that he seemed to be under the influence of drink.'

'The little beggar has broken out again,' cried Tom, turning with a face of dismay upon Hawthorne. 'I shall have to ship him to America.'

There was silence for a little space, and then the General turned with an icy politeness upon Hawthorne.

'I need not assure you, Mr. Hawthorne,' he began, 'of the sincerity of my esteem, or of the sorrow with which I have been compelled to put a veto upon your suit for my daughter's hand. If I had not formed a very high opinion of your personal qualities, I should never have given my consent to that suit. There, is, however, as you know, a bar between our families, and I do not see how it can be removed.'

'I know no more than this, sir,' returned Hawthorne, firmly, though with an air of deep respect; 'I have Miss Mallard's assurance that she could only have accepted me on one condition, and that condition remains altogether unchanged. The strange revelations

which had so large an effect upon your own mind have had none on hers. I have offered formally to release her from her engagement; but she declines to be released, unless I can tell her that it is by my own desire. I can't tell her that, sir, and I will not.'

'Mr. Hawthorne,' said the General, 'I don't always practise patience, but I believe in its virtues. In this case I myself am determined to exercise it, and I think it likely that I shall try your own. I would advise you, speaking as your friend—I would advise you not to nurture any hope in respect to this matter.'

'It is easy to advise, sir,' Hawthorne answered.

'I think,' said the General, 'that enough has been said on either side. It is to me extremely painful to take the stand I find myself compelled to take. I have heard much of you, Mr. Barton,' he added, with a dignity and candour which became him very well indeed, 'and I have learned so much of your history and character within the last fifteen

years, that I could scarcely dare to doubt your repeated assurance any longer. I believe you, sir, to be an honourable man. I find that is the universal opinion of your fellow-citizens, and I do not dare to challenge it.'

'Now, General Mallard,' said Tom, 'that is very handsomely said, and I am obliged to you for saying it; but, having said it, haven't you knocked down your own wicket?'

'No, sir,' answered the General, taking up the simile; 'I am umpire on my own side. Let us part, Mr. Barton, if we can, on terms of mutual respect. I commiserate what I can only regard as a tragic accident, but——'

'One minute, sir,' said Barton. 'I happen to have something in my hand here which may interest you.' He held out for a second the enveloped letter he had carried through the streets, and then, drawing out the letter itself, suffered the cover to flutter to the ground. 'I have got a letter from a London lawyer here—I think it may interest you to read it.'

The General drew from his waistcoat pocket his gold-rimmed reading-glasses, dropped his eye-glass with a little contortion of the facial muscles, set the glasses astride his nose, and took the letter to read.

'Sir,' he read, 'I have to inform you that, subject to your instructions, I have purchased the Abbey estate for the sum of three hundred and twenty thousand pounds, and have made a deposit of one hundred thousand pounds to Messrs. Eldon, Sons and Co., who represent the vendor. You will please note that payment of the purchase-money, as according to the terms of the agreement I was able to procure, will be completed within six months.'

The signature of the letter somehow ran blurred under the General's eyes, and he read no farther. He looked up, with a bewildered aspect, at Barton. Tom, in his turn, had ready another document for the General.

'I want you to see that, sir,' he said steadily, 'and if you are willing, I'd like you

to post it with your own hands. That's a duplicate draft, first half on the Bank of England for two hundred and twenty thousand pounds. I got that from the Bank of New South Wales this morning. That, you observe, completes the purchase.'

The general took the document and looked at it with the air of a man understanding nothing—he spoke no word.

'Now, General Mallard,' Tom resumed, 'there's my wedding-present to the bride.'

'Permit me,' said the General, somewhat feebly, 'to sit down.' He sat down, and with a trembling hand, strove in vain to adjust his glasses.

'This, Mr. Barton,' he said at last, 'is an extremely handsome offer. It is more than a handsome offer. It is, in short—it is a regal proposal. I can understand your feeling; I can enter into it. But you must excuse me if I speak my final words. You propose, sir, to double the fortune of my family. I admit that the proposition comes to me in a very

manly and handsome fashion—but I regret that I cannot accept it.'

'Excuse me,' Tom answered, squaring his shoulders anew and speaking in a tone he had not hitherto employed; 'but I don't think you quite see where you are going. Will you tell him the plain English of it, Michael, or shall I?'

Hawthorne hesitated, and Tom went on:

'It's time this thing was looked in the face, General Mallard. These two young people love each other. You mayn't know, and I daresay you don't, that my wife married me when I was awaiting the trial that sent me out for seven years to Van Diemen's Land—that's what one woman's love could lead her to, and here, if I'm not mistaken, is what another good girl's going to do. Your child will wait for as many years as you can make her wait, but she will marry Michael Hawthorne in the end. You can spoil her life if you like. You can make her wretched. You can keep my lad waiting, perhaps, till he's

pretty nearly as old as I am. I can speak for the Barton breed anyway; and I think I know your girl. I am a plain man, and I can't put this sort of thing in a pretty way as some men could, but there's the English of it. You can make mischief, but in the end you can't stop anything. Now, why make mischief—where's the harm? There's a secret, and the secret's buried.'

'No, sir,' cried the General, 'the secret is not buried. If it were——'

At that instant there was a clamour at the door. The bell rang, and then the knocker sounded, and at so unusual a summons the three men stood to listen. A hurried footstep sounded in the hall, and an instant later a servant entered with a letter.

'To be given to Mr. Barton instantly.'

Tom accepted it—opened it, and read it through, and handed it to Mallard.

'It's a sad business,' he said simply; 'but I think it settled what we were talking about.'

Mallard read:—

'Dear and Respected Madam,—Before putting a termination to an existence which has long been a burden to its owner, I have to thank you for many acts of kindness. You have borne long with an unfortunate wretch who can no longer bear with himself, and who, before your reception of this letter, will have ceased to be. I know no one else in the world to whom I care to say farewell, and I can only trust to your liberality to insure that an unfortunate man, who once occupied a respectable position in the world, shall be spared the degradation of a pauper's grave. I shall be found at Jackson's Town, in the bush, with this letter in my pocket.

'I am, Madam,

'Your obedient servant,

'Grateful, even in death,

'John Dogdyke.'

CHAPTER XLI

Mr. Dogdyke, though lifted to a height of temporal prosperity, such as he had not reached for many years, was far from being absolutely contented with his lot. The Count von Herder allowed him whatever small sums he demanded, making no demur at all for five pounds, or ten pounds, or even twenty, and actually offering no sign of resistance when Dogdyke wished to soar beyond that sum. The Count throughout was extremely suave and complacent, professing himself to be entirely submissive to the good Dogdyke's will, and perpetually congratulating the good Dogdyke on the courage and acumen he had displayed.

For his own part, Dogdyke was suspicious of the Count's demeanour. He was not so

much of a fool but that he knew the Count had no especial reason to love him, and that gentleman's exuberance of affection sometimes seemed to have a threat within it. Sometimes Dogdyke rejoiced in the delightful belief that he had conquered the Count, and felt as if he were a lion-tamer of the most extraordinary sort; at other moments he trembled in the very presence of his prey. But at last, after having been put by with numberless excuses, he determined to run what risk he might and to bring matters to a head.

He wrote to the Count requesting a final interview, and threatening, if matters were not arranged to his own satisfaction then and there, to make General Mallard cognisant of the whole situation. He posted his missive in great fear and trembling, and his contemplations of the possible consequences led him to the creation of terrible scenes, in which the Count evaded him with diabolical ingenuities or even put him to death with devilish cunning. He dreamt of these things

at night, and they upset him. He was driven to such a state of actual physical fear, that, when he received a note from the Count promising to give him an appointment in two days' time, he went out into the streets and wandered up and down until he found a gunsmith's shop, and there purchased a revolver and cartridges for his own protection. The mere possession of this weapon alarmed him, and he was afraid it might go off, at its own volition, at any instant. He had but a single scrap of paper in the Count's handwriting, but, inspired by his newly-developed fears, he put that by in a place of safety. It was but a trifle in itself, promising a meeting within two days and signed 'W. v. H.'; but it would serve to show, at least, in case of need, that the Count and Dogdyke had been in communication with each other.

By-and-bye came an intimation of the place of meeting, and this alarmed Dogdyke still further, for the spot appointed by the Count was between thirty and forty miles out

of town, and the frightened little man could see no reason why the appointment might not have been made with perfect safety at the house of his dreadful confederate. He thought this matter over far into the night, and the more he looked at it the less he seemed to like it. He took it to bed with him, and tossed about with it restlessly and miserably until the first grey gleam of dawn was seen at the window. Then, inspired with a sudden resolve, he rose and wrote two letters. One he addressed to the Count in these terms:

'To the Count von Herder.

'HONOURED SIR,—I am in receipt of your communication of yesterday, and shall keep the appointment you are therein good enough to offer me; but I desire respectfully to observe that, after a long and careful consideration of the question, I am unable to see on what grounds it is necessary that the appointment should be made at such a distance from your own residence or mine. I may further venture respectfully to state that on several

occasions I have thought your manner threatening. I trust you will not regard the observation as offensive, but I am not fully certain that you intend to give me fair play. You will see that it will not be safe to do anything else when I inform you that, before meeting you to-day, I shall prepare a complete statement of the facts for General Mallard's perusal, and that I shall leave that statement, sealed, behind me in the hands of a confidential person, who, in case I should not turn up in safety within forty-eight hours, will at once cause it to be delivered. Trusting that this friendly intimation may be received in the spirit in which it is written, and that there may be no breach in that confidence between us which has until now made our business so smooth and agreeable to both parties,

'I am, Sir,

'With every sentiment of respect,

'Your obedient servant,

'JOHN DOGDYKE.'

When he had addressed and sealed this letter, he sat down and wrote another, much more lengthy and elaborate. It took a good two hours' work to complete the second missive—not that it was extremely lengthy, but that its subject-matter demanded to be handled with great care and delicacy. It was addressed to General Mallard, and was intended to inform that gentleman, if ever it should reach his eye, of Dogdyke's complete devotion to his service, and the dangers into which that devotion had led him. Dogdyke, according to his own showing in this letter, had had an opportunity of associating the Count von Herder and the now disappeared Mr. Whateley with the impudent and gigantic fraud perpetrated on General Mallard some months ago. He was tracking the Count and was resolved to bring him to justice.

The criminal had now begun to temporise with him—Dogdyke—and was proposing to bribe him; should negotiations be

entered into for that purpose, Dogdyke professed himself willing and even eager to betray the villain to justice, and throughout the whole of the written pages there shone a spirit of indomitable self-sacrifice and an undying sense of private devotion to the public good which were, on the surface, extremely impressive. Dogdyke, having breakfasted and being ready to set out to meet the Count, intrusted these two letters to the head waiter of the hotel at which he stayed, with the strictest and most laborious injunctions. That addressed to the Count von Herder was to be despatched at once; the other, addressed to General Mallard, was not, on any account, to be delivered before Thursday, and in the case of Dogdyke's return in the interval, was to be surrendered to him personally.

'You observe,' said Dogdyke, addressing the waiter, 'that I have business with General Mallard, and that this contains the latest information I have to give him up till now.

I shall probably return to-night; at least,' he added, with an involuntary shudder, 'I hope so—I most particularly hope so—but if I should be delayed beyond the time I have specified, the letter must be delivered; but on no account send it before Thursday. If you hear from me by wire to that effect, you will not deliver the letter at all.'

The waiter, assuring Dogdyke that he understood the whole matter quite clearly, the little man made him recapitulate the instructions received, and finding him perfect, took his departure with a lighter heart. Some not quite accurately formed notion in his own mind, to the effect that he would not willingly have sacrificed half, had he owned such a sum, to anybody under any circumstances without a desperate struggle to retain it, may probably have helped to frighten him; for he could not fail to know that the Count was a much more cunning and a much more courageous person than himself, and he could not help a certain dim, inward, half confession

that, if he had dared to do it, he would rather have killed anybody who threatened him than have parted with such a sum of money. What sort of personal danger he dreaded was not quite clear even to himself.

The Count in a lonely place might stand over him and threaten him with personal violence, but he had his revolver, and he thought hysterically of having read a line somewhere, to the effect that firearms had equalised the size of men all the world over. The little man with six lives in his hand was bigger than the empty-handed giant. Had he been less afraid of the weapon itself than he was, this reflection might have brought more solid comfort to him.

In his day Dogdyke had done a good deal of reading, of the sort now described by American journalists as 'wild cat.' It had mostly been got through in his far-off youth, but now that he was himself engaged in a business so terribly romantic, many of his early reminiscences came back upon him,

and he thought of abductions of important witnesses in criminal cases, of bands of hired ruffians who spirited away the person who ought to have been the beneficent genius of the story, hiding him or her in caves.

In these narratives, long-forgotten, and only recalled to memory by the strange conditions of the time, beneficent genius always turned up at the finish to fulfil his mission. Possibly, the sense in Dogdyke's mind, that his own mission was not likely to have a beneficent result for anybody but himself, may have subdued his confidence in the belief that the like happy fate would befall him. In any case, the foolish narratives helped him little, and, indeed, brought him vastly more alarm than solace.

Since he had begun to share the Count's good fortune he was considerably changed in aspect. He was eminently respectable now, in clothes of black broadcloth which fitted him with reasonable accuracy; in black hat,

black kid gloves, black satin stock, and high collars. In the absence of the great cuffs with which he had grown so familiar, his hands were a trouble to him, and he seemed hardly to know how to dispose of them; but to the casual observer he was no more than a rather quaint and obviously nervous old gentleman.

He travelled from Sydney to the point at which he had been instructed to alight, in a first-class carriage, in company with a city business man and a red-faced, big-bearded fellow who evidently represented the pastoral interests—a broad-shouldered man in a pot hat, rough tweed flannel shirt, and sheepskin gaiters. The two men—strangers to Dogdyke—had some friendly knowledge of each other, and talked about the news in that morning's paper.

Amongst other items they discussed was one of a robbery committed in the back-blocks by a gang of ruffians, who, for a week or two, had imitated with fair success the ex-

ploits of the famous Kelly gang, the notorious gang of bushrangers, the very thought of whom had often struck terror to Dogdyke's heart in lonely places in the suburbs, though he had known the band to be dispersed, and the scene of its depredations to be hundreds of miles away.

'The fact is,' said the pastoral-looking man, 'the whole colony is full of a lot of good-for-nothing blackguards, who'd as lief cut your throat as look at you. I'd dare undertake to say there are hundreds of escapés from New Caledonia here in the colony this minute. Some of them are the most desperate blackguards unhung. Why, I heard of a case only the other day within ten miles of Sydney where one of them stuck up a George Street merchant, and frightened five-and-twenty notes out of him. We shall have a revival of the old business here if the police don't wake up.'

The city man pooh-poohed this idea, and

prophesied the setting in of a universal reign of law and order.

'My dear sir, a repetition of the old condition of affairs is absolutely impossible—absolutely impossible. The condition of things within the last five years has changed completely.'

The pastoralist was vehement in contradiction, and cited deeds of violence enough to have supplied a calendar for a whole assize. Dogdyke sat and shivered. The conversation seemed as if it were actually personal to himself, and on occasions the pastoral gentleman made facial appeals to him, as if he would draw him into the converse, and bring him to his own view of things.

'I trust, sir,' he said at last, egged on by his own fears, 'that you exaggerate. I assure you I hope so, sir, both for the reputation of the colony and the safety of its inoffensive citizens.'

'And I assure you, sir,' said the red-complexioned man, turning upon him with a

dictatorial certainty of manner and a booming voice—'I assure you, sir, that I do *not* exaggerate. There are hundreds of men in this colony, at this minute, who'd be guilty of any infernal act of scoundrelism for a square meal and a long sleever.'

'I—I trust not, sir,' Dogdyke stammered, and so subsided. He pressed his gloved hand on the pocket in which the revolver he had purchased as a safeguard against the possible machinations of the Count lay concealed; but he did it with a timorous and careful hand, lest he should fire it unawares. He was possessed by a ghastly uncertainty as to the nature of its mechanism, and had only the faintest notion as to the number of processes by which it might be fired.

He was certain that, if the idea had only occurred to him, the Count von Herder was fully capable of hiring a gang of such desperadoes as the pastoral gentleman spoke of to carry him away, and if needs were to hand him bodily over to a tribe of those canni-

balistic natives of whom he had many times heard with shuddering.

In short, there was no idea too grotesquely ghastly to present itself to the frightened Dogdyke's fancy, and before he had reached his journey's end he had a score of times resolved to avail himself of the return ticket he had purchased, and return to the city without having attempted to interview the Count. But every time his exaggerated caution established its claim his greed upset it. Thirty thousand pounds lay waiting for him, and thirty thousand pounds meant much. At moments he was filled with a frenzied courage, and with the revolver in his hands, which he did not know how to use, and which frightened him more than it was likely to frighten anybody else in the world, he was ready to face dragons. He ran away in fancy, times without number; he fought numerous desperate combats; he won and lost them in orderly routine, and was landed at the little country town he had booked for

in a state of abject uncertainty. He was before the time appointed, and could at least afford to look at the lay of the country.

He kept well within view of the township for a while, and, reaching the skirt of the bush, peered down the road in uncertainty. Then he ventured a little into the forest, and finding the tract a broad high-road, seamed by the wheels of many waggons, and open to the light and air, he took a little courage, and went on. He went on, in fine, until he saw the solitary figure of the Count von Herder lounging towards him, and then, transferring his weapon to a pocket in which he thought it would lie readier to his grasp in case of necessity, he mustered up his last ounce of courage and walked on to meet the Count.

CHAPTER XLII

The Count von Herder sat in his own room with the door locked, and with half-a-dozen sheets of letter-paper scattered before him on the table. These letters, had anyone been there to inspect them, would have been found to bear a curious and even a striking resemblance to one another. They were word for word the same, and only faintly differed in characteristics of caligraphy. Some of them contained only a line or two, others were almost fully written; but, as far as they went, they were identical. The Count, with that big monocle at his eye which he had once before employed whilst working in collaboration with Mr. Whateley, surveyed the last of these letters with a particular attention, and then, with a quiet nod or two, he folded

it up, and put it in an envelope, which was already addressed to Mrs. Barton, the Grampians, Potts Point, Sydney.

When he had done this he put the letter carefully in his pocket-book, took up all the scattered sheets of paper from the table, and placed them in the fire. The winter as yet was far away, but it had pleased the Count to have a fire lit in his own private room that morning. He watched the paper with great care whilst it flamed and faded, and even took the precaution to hold it down with a fire-shovel, lest any fragment of it should escape up the chimney. When it was consumed to tinder, he stirred the fire until the last traces of burning paper should have disappeared. Then he threw open the window to allow the odour of burning, which filled the room, to dissipate.

'That,' he said to himself, 'will do egcellently well, I am inclined to think: and now, my goot Dogdyke, you will find how foolish a thing it was to set your wits against mine.'

He saw that his cigar case and cigarette case were both well stocked, dressed without the assistance of his servant, drew on his gloves with much precision and neatness, and left the house on foot. His manner was quite placid and composed, and to the few ladies and gentlemen of his acquaintance whom he met, he raised his hat with his customary flourish of continental politeness, and his usual beaming smile. Arrived at the railway station, he took a ticket a minute before the arrival of the train he desired to catch, ensconced himself in a first-class smoking carriage, which happened to be tenantless save for himself, and was so borne away. Being alone and free from observation, he sank into deep thought, and his face began to reveal more freely the workings of his mind, and his look boded mischief. At all times there was to the observant physiognomist a latent ferocity in it, but now the inborn cruelty and pitilessness of the man shone out without disguise. He meditated long with

folded arms, saturnine face, and half-closed eyes, and awoke only to a sense of his surroundings whenever the train stopped at a wayside station. He was soon beyond the limits of the city, and the train, which ran over a by-line, travelled but slowly. More than an hour had elapsed before he reached the termination of his journey. The brake groaned hard on the shrieking metal of the rail, and the Count rose a second or two before the necessary time, and laid his hand upon the door.

'You haf asked for it, my goot Dogdyke,' he muttered to himself with a smile. 'And you must haf what you haf asked for.'

He alighted from the train, presented his ticket to the porter at the station gate, and struck out in the direction of a little township visible half a mile away. He had not gone far when he diverged to the left, and in a little while he found himself in the midst of ring-barked eucalyptus trees, standing grotesque and ghastly in the autumn sunlight.

There was a plainly marked track, and he trod it confidently, strolling at no great pace, until the figure of Dogdyke appeared in sight.

'There you are,' said the Count to himself; 'good and vell.'

He waved his hand, and Dogdyke responded with a like signal. The Count deliberately screwed on to his face a smile of genial humour, and when he reached the little man, slapped a hand into his with sounding emphasis of welcome.

'So,' he said, 'you are punctual both to time and place, my egcellent Dogdyke! Now, here, do you see, we can arranche things.'

'Ye-es,' said Dogdyke, uncertainly; 'but I don't know what you wanted me to come out here for. We might have done our business at your house, or anywhere.'

'There, my tear Dogdyke, as I assured you before,' said the Count, 'you are a little mistaken. The pusiness we have in hand together could not have been done at all con-

veniently in town, I do assure you; we will tiscuss it here, as we walk——'

'Upon my word,' said Dogdyke, 'I don't know what we came out here for. If I'd known that the place was like this, I don't think I'd have come.'

'Why not, my goot Dogdyke?' asked the Count, taking him by the arm. 'Why shouldn't you have come?'

Dogdyke slipped away from him, and stood panting and palpitating at a distance from his auditor.

'Look here, sir,' he said; 'I don't half like this. I don't like your looks, sir, and that's a fact. But don't you think, Count von Herder, that I've come here to put myself at your mercy. I'm not unprepared; I assure you, sir, that I am not unprepared.'

He slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out a revolver. 'You offer to meet me in a country place,' he said, 'when you could do your business just as well in town. If you'll excuse me remarking on the fact, sir,

that makes me a little suspicious. You'll observe that I have taken some——'

'Precaution,' said the Count, finishing his hesitating sentence for him. 'My goot Dogdyke, you are really a very apsurd small person. Don't you see how necessary it is that we should not be seen too much together? I am suddenly enriched, my egcellent frient, and you and I know how, and why. That, to begin with, might excite suspicion. But if you and I both are suddenly enriched, and have been seen much together in the meantime, don't you see, you trivial and unobservant-minded Dogdyke, how that intensifies suspicion?'

'That's all right,' said Dogdyke, who still held the revolver in his hand.

'Put up that tool,' said the Count, banteringly. 'You'll haf no use for that. Let's sit down and talk the matter over. Tell me now, actually, what it is you want.'

'I have told you already, sir,' said Dogdyke. 'There was a split between you

and Whateley. I can't get hold of Whateley, but I think you and me must say halves. I think that really, sir.'

'No, my goot Dogdyke,' returned the Count. 'I won't say halves. To pegin with, you are very much mistaken in supposing that Mr. Whateley and myself secured the sum you carry in your mind between us. We did nothing of the sort. There were two other people engaged in that little transaction, and the two other people demanded to be paid. Now I want you, Dogdyke, definitely to understand, if you'll so far favour me, that I am not a very easy man to frighten. I am a little timid now. I don't like your handling of that weapon, my egcellent Dogdyke. Put it away. I can assure you that you'll find no use for it.'

Dogdyke seemed to read something in his face, or a new access of his own fears disturbed him. He drew slowly back a yard or two, holding the shaking revolver pointed at the Count.

'I'd never have come out here,' he said, 'if

I'd known what sort of a place it was. We're a mile away from anybody. I don't trust you.'

'My goot Dogdyke,' replied the Count, with an admirable phlegm, 'while you hold that tangerous tool in that way, I'm very far from trusting you. Put it away. Let's talk pusiness. You have pothered me a great deal of late, and to deal frankly with you, I am growing a little tired.'

'I am growing tired myself,' said Dogdyke. 'You agreed to halves, and I'm not going to be satisfied with less.'

'I want you to understand, Dogdyke,' said the Count, 'that I am not prepared to surrender what you ask. Insanest of creatures, why do you want to dangle that foolish thing before me? Put it down, I tell you; I've seen enough of it.'

'All right, sir,' returned Dogdyke. 'I haven't the faintest desire to do anybody a mischief, but I'm going to take care of myself; and if I'd known what sort of a place it was, I wouldn't have come here.'

'You tell me that,' the Count replied, 'for the twentieth time; but you are here, and you are here for egcellent good reason; and here, or not at all, we will conduct our pusiness. Put that thing away.'

Dogdyke lingeringly obeyed, but he kept his distance.

'Now,' said the Count, 'you are an armed man, and my hands are empty. Why should you be afrait of me? Let us sit down and talk together. I shall gif you a thousand pounts if you vill go to America, and let me haf done vith you.'

Dogdyke shook his head. 'I am not here to take a thousand pounds, sir,' he said. 'I shall not dream of taking any such amount. Don't believe it, Count von Herder. You never fell into a bigger error in your life.'

'So!' cried the Count. 'You browbeat me, my goot Dogdyke. Understand,' he waved his fat gloved forefinger at his shrunken little adversary, with an air of open menace, 'I have brought you here to tell you that I will gif

you one thousand pounts to go, and that I will gif you no more; and I haf brought you here to tell you, too, that I am a very tangerous man to fight against.'

Dogdyke's blood took a sudden chill, and he whipped his hand once more to his breast-pocket, and laid it on the butt of the revolver.

'No, no,' said the Count, smiling in a rather ugly way to look at. 'I don't mean violence here, or yet, my goot Dogdyke. I haf here for you one thousand pounts. Will you go and let me see the last of you?'

'No!' cried Dogdyke, with an exasperated whine, 'I won't. I'll have fair halves or nothing.'

'I'll go this much further,' said the Count. 'I'll rise to one bid higher, and I should very urgently atvise you, my tear, goot, charming Dogdyke, not to refuse that bid, for your sake and for mine.' His eyes glittered, each a mere slit behind his glasses, and his teeth were bared. His voice rose a full octave, and he questioned:

'Will you please understand that I mean pusiness?'

Dogdyke liked him less and less, but the loaded revolver gave him confidence. 'I want half,' he answered, 'and I won't take a penny less than half. I'm not to be defrauded of my share. I can guess,' he added, with a tremulous defiance, 'what you have got me here for. I can see it in your wicked face, but I am protected. Don't you think I'm going to walk in front of you. Don't you think I'm going to travel back with you. Don't you think I'm going to give you a chance of having your wicked will on me.'

'Do you know, Dogdyke,' the Count responded to this quivering threat, 'that you are really a very shrewd judge of character? I can offer two ways out of the dilemma in which your little tiscovery placed me. I can pay you as much as two thousand pounts—one thousand here this moment, and one thousand when you reach America; or if you don't accept that chenerous offer, I can——' he paused.

Dogdyke questioned: 'What?'

'I can really, my little frient,' the Count answered enigmatically, 'I really can, believe me.'

'I don't care,' said Dogdyke, with a courage half hysteric and half brandified. 'I can guess what you meant to do with me if I'd come here unarmed.'

'Tut, tut, tut!' cried the Count. 'Haven't we heard enough of that? Do you take my offer?'

'No!' said Dogdyke.

The Count looked at him in anger, and Dogdyke recoiled an inch or two, and pointed his weapon.

Little by little the expression of Von Herder's face changed, and in half a minute, to Dogdyke's amazement, he was beaming on him with a smile absolutely amiable and admiring.

The Count drew a little quick sigh and dropped an exclamation. 'Well, well,' he said, 'I had thought you, in a quiet place like this, an easy man to frighten. It seems I am a fool,

and that, my goot Dogdyke, has not often happened in my experience. I was mistaken in you. I thought I could bounce you, but I find it impossible. I must submit, since there is nothing else for it. You may as well take your first thousand pounts at once, and you shall haf a cheque for the balance to-morrow.' The voice of self-banter, in which he had begun the speech, sank into a tone of deliberative regret on the last words. He wound up with a full-chested sigh of resignation, and drew a pocket-book from his breast-pocket.

'Now,' said Dogdyke, 'if you'll allow me to say so, you're talking sense.'

'It's of little use to talk anything else with you, Dogdyke,' Von Herder answered, flashing a swift smile at him. 'Here,' he continued, opening the pocket-book, 'here is your first instalment in notes.'

Dogdyke, revolver in hand, advanced to secure the sum proffered him. He laid thumb and forefinger on the folded bundle of notes, but the Count held tight.

'Not yet,' he said. 'You haf this money to-day; you haf my cheque for the remainder to-morrow; but you don't take it without an acknowledgment.'

'An acknowledgment!' Dogdyke answered.

'Yes,' the Count answered, 'an acknowledgment. What is to prevent you from coming back again next year?'

'No fear of that, sir,' Dogdyke answered.

'We vill, if you please,' answered the Count, quite amiably and calmly, 'put it beyond all doubt. You see I have come, my egcellent Dogdyke, prepared for many contingencies. Here is a brand-new pocket-book purchased yesterday. Here is a stylographic pen, also purchased yesterday. The pocket-book shall be used for one purpose only—you shall make an entry into it.'

'An entry!' Dogdyke questioned. 'To what effect, sir?'

'You shall write: "I, the undersigned, confess to having received from the Count von Herder the sum of thirty thousand pounts, a

fourth part of the proceeds of a fraud effected upon General Mallard, upon such-and-such a date." Our memory is good for that, my tear Dogdyke, and you shall sign it with your own hand. Then, if ever you should make any threatening move against me, you will be fastening the handcuffs on your own wrists. Eh?'

Dogdyke, with his weapon in one hand and the forefinger and thumb of the other still clasping the bundle of bank-notes, deliberated a moment.

'I don't see any harm in that, sir,' he answered. 'At least, you can't use that against me.'

'No said the Count, 'I shall not tesire to use that against you. You will write that?'

'Yes,' said Dogdyke. 'I don't see why I shouldn't.'

The Count surrendered the bundle of bank-notes, and Dogdyke pouched them with a trembling eagerness.

'Now,' said the Count, tendering pen and pocket-book, 'there is a fallen log within four

yards of you. Sit town on that and write to my dictation.'

The Count himself led the way to the log. It stood at an even smaller distance than he had mentioned from the track. The Count set one foot upon it, and hopped lightly over to the other side. 'Now,' he said to Dogdyke, 'sit down and write.' The little man obeyed.

'Put down the date. Now: "I, the undersigned, confess to having received from the Count von Herder"'—the Count's left hand stole slowly under his own coat and gripped the handle of a revolver, which reposed in a pocket upon his hip. He stood a little to Dogdyke's left and went on in an impassive voice: '"the sum of thirty thousand pounts, being the fourth share of the proceeds of a fraud on General Mallard, in which I confess myself to have been implicated.' The Count's left hand transferred the weapon to the right.

'In which,' mumbled Dogdyke, in reply, bending over the pocket-book, and writing, 'I confess myself to be implicated.'

A shot sounded, and Dogdyke dropped from the log without a sound. The Count took a quick step towards the track, and, cowering in the shelter of a tree, looked both ways, returned swiftly, and, acting throughout with much rapidity and without a sign of flurry or disorder, he took up the pocket-book and the stylographic pen, returned the revolver to the pocket from which he had taken it, sought for the weapon with which Dogdyke a while ago had threatened him, and thrust the butt of it into the dead man's hand. Then he knelt beside him, and, with great care, insinuated the lax forefinger of the right hand round the trigger, and with the hand in that posture compelled it to fire a single shot into the air. Then he suffered the hand to fall, and, rising, looked down upon his murdered enemy for a moment with a cold scorn.

'I told you, Dogdyke,' he said, half aloud. 'You should haf taken your two thousand pounts, my frient.'

He stooped again over the body, drew from the breast-pocket of the dead Dogdyke's coat the notes he had lately surrendered to him, and in their stead left a letter addressed to Mrs. Barton, of the Grampians, Potts Point, Sydney. Then he walked towards the track, and after a quick promenade of a hundred yards in the direction for which he had originally started, he paused to brush a little dust from his knees, to arrange his coat and waistcoat, and to light a cigar. Then, with no sign of the murderous act upon him, save that his face was a trifle paler than common, he went upon his way.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE Count von Herder had, in his time, been guilty of many criminal actions, but he had never until that hour taken, or even attempted, the life of a fellow-creature. The sensations following on the act were unexpectedly grim and terrible, but he endured them with a stoic calm. So far as he may be said to have any creed at all, he belonged to that advanced modern school which has abolished God, and has wiped out all the old notions about a future state and a time of universal reckoning from existence.

It is quite possible that a philosopher of angelic native tendencies may be, so far as conduct is concerned, none the worse for holding that godless and hopeless creed; but it is perfectly certain that the philosopher

whose tendencies are innately diabolic may be very much the worse indeed for it. To live the day, to take his pleasure for the time being, at any man's cost, to rely absolutely upon his own skill and cunning to save him from the meshes of the law, to deride the possibility of a future judgment, and to live, in short, a life of complete self-centred greed, unchastened by belief or fear, had been the Count von Herder's habit for a lifetime.

He had arranged beforehand that his share in Dogdyke's death should go unsuspected, and had even prepared the world beforehand for a belief in Dogdyke's suicide. He was safe at last. Entirely and wholly safe until the body should be discovered, and even when that happened, he was guarded by the weapon to be found in the dead man's hand, and by the written confession of suicide which lay in his breast-pocket, addressed to Mrs. Barton. In face of the circumstances, there was no possibility of suspicion being directed against himself.

In spite, however, of all his assurance of personal safety, he knew that his nerves twitched in a novel and disagreeable manner, and he could guess that his face was unusually pale. These were signs of inward agitation which he himself could recognise, and which he set himself resolutely to subdue. He strode along the bush track, smoking, and little by little brought himself to entire self-control.

As he drew nearer the township from which he had started, he encountered one or two people: a teamster with his team, a mounted shepherd with half-a-dozen dogs at his horse's heels, and a sun-burnt swagsman with his stuffed blue blanket hanging from his shoulder. To each of these the Count gave a smiling good-day, and in the eyes of each looked tranquil, harmless, and unoccupied. If they gave him a thought at all, it could only have been one of some surprise to find a man, attired as he was, strolling alone in a place so unfrequented.

As he approached the station at which he had alighted an hour or two before he was conscious of a renewal of his tremors. He selected and lit a new cigar, arresting himself in his walk to do so, and schooling his hand to renewed steadiness and his face, at least, to impassivity. When he was quite sure that he had succeeded he ventured on again; he made inquiries about the train, and, discovering that he had some hours to wait, chartered a buggy, pretending business twenty miles further on, and was driven to the place of his choice. It shook his iron nerves anew to find that the track led him past the spot he had so recently quitted, but his driver saw nothing; and the Count himself, feigning to be lost in thought, buried his face in one hand, and, glancing obliquely at the spot, saw nothing. Dogdyke's figure was hidden by the log from which he had fallen. The journey was accomplished without adventure, the driver of the buggy was paid and dismissed, and the Count made a pretence of

eating at a rough little wayside shanty, by way of whiling away the time.

As the hour approached for the departure of the train, he strolled on to the station, demanded a first-class ticket to Sydney, and in due time rolled away. He tore the return half of the ticket he had originally taken into fragments, and dropped them bit by bit from the carriage window.

Before he reached the city he was almost himself again, and the tremors which had shaken him had disappeared. He scoffed at them now, and despised himself for ever having felt them. That a man of his experience and courage should suffer from mere nerves seemed shameful to him; but when he had reached his own luxuriously-appointed house, he was glad of a glass of wine. That seemed completely to re-establish him, and, being physically restored, he was able easily to regain his own good graces. The thing was done, and well done; he was rid of a threat and a nuisance, and he was free of the

consequences. He sat thinking thus, when a servant brought him a letter.

'This came by messenger, sir,' the man said, as he handed it to him, 'a few minutes after you went out this morning.'

The Count, cigar in mouth, was lounging in his favourite attitude on the sofa. He nodded idly, and answered, with a lazy wave of the hand, 'Put it on the table. I'll see to it py-and-py.'

The servant obeyed and retired, and the Count, for a little while, lay smoking thoughtfully. His mind was busy with his own schemes again. He had a handsome sum in hand and a wealthy match before him. The Countess von Herder, buried in her charitable and religious duties in far-off Esselbach, would never hear of him, and if she did would never take note of his doings. As for bigamy pure and simple, that had never been a thing to frighten a man of Von Herder's mettle. The Countess and he had agreed a dozen years and more ago to do without each other, and

to his thinking she was likely neither to know nor care whether he were alive or dead. The Sydney widow was a vulgar person certainly, and would reflect no credit on the rank he proposed to bestow upon her. As the Countess von Herder she was positively laughable, but the Count proposed to himself a scheme of social distinction and enjoyment in which his wife would bear no part, or a part so small as scarcely to be worth taking into consideration.

With fifteen thousand pounds a year behind him Von Herder was sure of all the social distinction for which he cared; he believed himself to have the noblest and most completely gentlemanly manner of any man who had ever visited that continent, and he was satisfied that his title, with such a fortune to back it, would carry him anywhere without risk of dispute. He indulged these fancies until his cigar was finished, and then, half rising, stretched out a lazy hand to draw the letter to him.

A curious little quick shock ran through his frame from head to foot as his eye fell upon the superscription, and for a second or two he was not clearly conscious of anything. Then he awoke to the fact that he had been strangely startled, and pooh-poohed those treacherous nerves of his, which were beginning to give way in odd moments in so unaccustomed a fashion. He thrust his fat forefinger into the opening of the envelope, and tore it vigorously across.

'Let me see,' the Count murmured, half aloud, 'what the goot Dogdyke can have had to say to me.' He read it first with mere hums and hahs: '"Shall keep the appointment you are therein good enough to offer me." Exactly! "Unable to see on what grounds it is necessary that the appointment should be made at such a distance from your residence or mine." Quite so, Dogdyke, quite so. "On several occasions I have thought your manner threatening." Dear me, Dogdyke, you surprise me.'

When he came to the lines in which Dogdyke wrote he was not fully certain that fair play would be given him, the Count smiled horribly, with a little half-audible chuckle, but at the next sentence he rose to his feet with the letter crumpled in both hands. '"I shall prepare a complete statement of the facts for General Mallard's perusal, and I shall leave that statement sealed behind me in the hands of a confidential person, who, in case I should not turn up in safety within forty-eight hours, will at once cause it to be delivered."'

The Count stood for one instant as if he were frozen into the attitude which he had unconsciously taken; then, with an oath, he dashed the letter to the floor, and began, with his slippered feet, to range quite silently up and down the room. He clenched his hands together until the jewels he wore bruised and cut his soft, white fingers, and when, with a gesture of passionate impatience and self-disdain, he struck himself upon the forehead, he left a mark of blood there. He stooped to re-

cover the letter. The act of stooping always brought with him a rush of blood to the head, and now, with his newly-awakened terror and rage, this was so strong that he fell upon his knees and for a little while groped blindly upon the floor, not knowing what he sought. When he had recovered himself he sat down, gasping, smoothed the crumpled paper on his knee, and read it over once more. He walked to the sideboard, poured out some wine, and drank two or three glasses in swift succession.

'That will do,' he said—'forty-eight hours; forty-two hours from now at least—something should be done in forty-two hours.' He cast another glance at the letter which he still held in his hand, and was horrified to see that there were blood-stains on it. A moment's thought assured him of the reason, and he grew comparatively calm again. Moving with a swift and sudden gesture, he locked the door, flung himself into a great padded arm-chair, dropped his great head between his hands, and set himself to work to think.

There was no clue afforded to the whereabouts of the letter Dogdyke had undoubtedly left behind. In forty-two hours from that moment the police would be on his track; and when Dogdyke's body came to be found, as sooner or later it most assuredly would be, his cleverly-planned forgery might be of little avail to him.

The more clearly his mind worked, the more certain it became to him that the forged letter would be of no avail at all. Dogdyke had openly visited his house; Dogdyke had taken a journey up country on the same day as himself, and it was quite foolish and useless to suppose that either of them had completely escaped observation. There were half-a-dozen people who would be able to identify him, and he could find no reason for his presence in the neighbourhood in which the crime had been committed but the real one.

The charge once brought against him by General Mallard, there were a score of circumstances which would rise up to confront him.

The bankers with whom he had trusted the proceeds of that successful criminal venture would volunteer a statement of the time at which his gains had been transferred to them, and there was no possibility of inventing other sources for them. He was beaten, and he had no hope but in flight. How to get away—where to go to?

Had he been in Europe or America he could have discovered a thousand cross-trails, and have plunged into the great sea of men and have lost himself there. If he were but out of that accursed island continent he could take care of himself; here, everybody knew him—he was a man of mark, he could travel nowhere without being recognised.

The thought of disguise was futile; he had no means for it, no skill in it; and though his knowledge of English was for all other purposes complete, he knew that his accent would betray him if he should attempt to disguise his nationality. What to do, then? The figure of the despised Dogdyke grew suddenly

terrible and awful; the body, to his disordered fancy, lay in such a posture that the dead, outcast hand, with the pistol in it, pointed the weapon at his breast. He dismissed the fancy, and asked himself, with a passionate scorn, what it would matter if the thing were true. He clutched his head with both hands, and held it hard as he strained his mind to think.

But the dead hand pointed remorselessly and would not be forgotten. Already the crime in itself had ceased to shake him in remembrance, and it was horrible now only because he had ensnared himself by it, and for the sake of what now seemed a trifle had thrown over the possibilities of a long life of wealth and luxury. Strive as he would to plan a way of escape, he could really bind his mind to nothing but the thought that he might have rid himself of Dogdyke in any one of endless ways. There his thoughts were fertile, and he lured Dogdyke to his own destruction by endless cunning strategies; he

paid him in full, and swindled him of the base-got gains in a thousand half-hatched plans; but the one question to which it was essential he should pin his thoughts constantly eluded him.

He passed a hideous night, but before the morning came he saw, or partly saw, his way. So far as he could clearly see it, he matured his plans. And on the morrow, having dressed with his usual scrupulous nicety, he drove down to the bank in which he had deposited the greater part of his money, and asked to see the manager. He was almost instantly admitted, and, conscious that his face, command it how he would, betrayed some trouble, made a pretence of illness.

'I am hardly fit for pusiness this morning, but time and tide wait for no man, eh? I have had a dreatful night. Such heatache I have not known. Your Sytney climate, I fancy, is not goot for people who, like myself, are not accustomed to it.'

The manager defended the climate stoutly,

and the Count, playing on the theme, grew to be more at ease.

'I am running down to Melbourne for a time; then perhaps to Tasmania, next to Adelaide. I shall look for the chourney to restore me a little, and in the meantime I shall tesire you to transfer my deposit to your Adelaide agents. I have emparked on some large speculations there, and shall have neet of capital.'

The manager promised that these instructions should be promptly obeyed, and the Count rose to go. He had shaken hands and had reached the door when he turned, with a laugh.

'This poor heat of mine! I do assure you that I can chenerally contrive to keep it clear, but with these horriple heataches I can think of nothing. I shall want to cash a cheque today; I shall want to draw two thousand pounts.'

The manager referred him to the cashier, and the Count, with his customary flourish,

withdrew. He drew his money in large notes, taking only some twenty pounds in gold for immediate use, and so departed.

The Count had not embarked all his eggs in one basket. He drove to the other bank in which his money was invested, told there a similar story, drew a cheque for a similar amount, and then went home. He had four thousand pounds with which to begin the world anew; he was leaving the rest behind him, but he felt that it would be an evil policy to draw suspicion on himself at the start by making his drain upon the banks too heavy.

When the hue and cry opened, his transfer of the money to Adelaide would at least draw inquiries in that direction. Sooner or later he would be expected there. He knew that he was making an enormous sacrifice, but he was playing now for life and not for money. In one respect the born gambler and the born swindler are alike. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is light come, light go, with

each of them; the swindler on a large scale was never yet a miser.

There remained nothing now but to trust to the chapter of accidents. Having sent observation south and west, he himself must make his own way north, and trust to chance not to be too often recognised.

CHAPTER XLIV

The confession of Dogdyke's suicide was passed from hand to hand, and scrutinised by each in turn. Barton knew the handwriting well, and had no suspicion of the authorship of the letter.

'That's what he's come to, is it?' said Tom, sadly. 'I should never have thought that he'd have found the pluck for that. Poor old Dogdyke; he dropped very low at the finish, but I remember when he was a swell, and I was very glad to know him. He did me a very good turn once on a time, and for a year or two he was like a father to you, Michael.'

Mallard's one desire was to close the interview, and to be rid of his unwelcome visitors. The news just brought did not seem to affect

him in the least, but the intelligence of a sudden and violent death had something sacred in it all the same, and the silence which fell on Barton's words was not likely to be broken. Barton was still shaking his head over the letter, when the servant who had brought it appeared again.

'I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir, but here's a person who says that he must see you at once. He has a letter which he says he will only deliver into your hands personally, sir.'

'A person?' demanded the General. 'What sort of person?'

'He's an hotel waiter, sir,' the man responded.

Mallard walked into the hall, and confronted the waiter to whom Dogdyke had intrusted his two missives before he set out upon his fatal errand.

'Well?' said the General, briefly.

'You're General Mallard, sir?' the man answered.

'I am General Mallard.'

'This letter was put into my hands, sir,' said the waiter, 'two days ago by Mr. Dogdyke, a gentleman staying in our hotel. If he did not come back within forty-eight hours, I was to deliver it to you personally. I am an hour or two late, sir, but I could not get away before.'

Mallard took the letter with a puzzled frown and half opened it.

'Mr. Dogdyke?' he said questioningly.

'Yes, sir; Mr. Dogdyke. I am told, sir,' the man added with a troubled air, 'that there's news of Mr. Dogdyke's having been found dead in the bush thirty or forty miles up country, and that is why I made bold not to give the letter to your servant.'

'Wait there,' said the General, curtly, and so swung round upon his heel and limped swiftly back into the room in which Barton and Hawthorne awaited him.

'Excuse me once more,' he said. 'This is a strange business. I have a letter here from

the man of whose suicide you have just learned. Why he should write to me is more than I can divine.'

Dogdyke's letter was bulky, and its contents were verbose. Mallard read with growing amazement, and when he had finished handed the letter without a word to Barton.

'General Mallard,' said Tom, looking up before he had got half way through Dogdyke's epistle, 'I think this is going to be very serious. If my opinion is worth anything, the man who forged your name forged this'—indicating the sham letter from Dogdyke. 'To my mind, this spells murder. You'll want the best advice you can have, and if you'll allow me, sir, Mr. Denton is staying in my house. You know him well already. There's no smarter lawyer in the world. Will you let me send for him?'

The General assented. 'I am obliged to you, sir,' he said somewhat stiffly.

'Here, Michael,' said Barton, 'you are likely to be as swift of foot as any of them;

get down at once, and tell Denton to come here.'

Michael as yet knew nothing of the contents of the second letter, and was in a state of complete amazement and mystery at the behaviour of his seniors. He obeyed at once, however, and in a little while, having lighted upon a disengaged cab on his way, was back with Denton. The waiter still lingered in the hall, curious to know the upshot of the affair. Denton, once apprised of the facts, set to work with perfect coolness.

'The man who brought this letter—is he still here? Is that the man I saw in the hall? Bring him in.'

The waiter, being questioned, returned simple and intelligent answers. The letter had been put into his hands precisely fifty-one hours ago. Mr. Dogdyke had mentioned casually that he was going up country, and that he expected to be back on the same evening at about seven o'clock. He had made arrangements to check the delivery of the

letter by telegram. No message had arrived, and no news had been heard of him, only a rumour had spread throughout the city to the effect that his dead body had been discovered, and that he was supposed to have committed suicide.

'That will do,' said Denton, finding that it had exhausted the man's stock of knowledge. 'You may go. You will be wanted at the inquest, and in the meantime the less you say about this matter the better. And now,' he added, when he was once more alone with Mallard, Barton, and Hawthorne, 'the first thing to be done is obviously to communicate with the police. Von Herder will probably suppose himself to be in safety, and we may trap him in an hour.'

'You think,' the General asked, 'that he has committed murder?'

'I have little doubt of it,' said Denton. 'We are certain at least that Dogdyke has not committed suicide. Let us set to work at once. You kept the cab, Michael?'

'Yes,' replied Hawthorne, 'it stands at the door still.'

'You and I, Mallard,' said Denton, turning to the General, 'had better drive at once to the police-station. You may get your money back yet.'

It was on the tip of his tongue to say that he had had some faint reason for suspecting the Count von Herder all along, but his own self-respect kept him silent. In the light which had newly fallen, he could see how foolish his own scruples had been, and it hit him hard to think that he was himself in a sense accessory to Dogdyke's death. If his own over-scrupulous care for his word had not kept him silent, he might have been on Von Herder's track long since, and this last and most terrible crime of all might have been prevented. It was useless to think of that now, but the reflection spurred him to a determined effort in pursuit. The police had news of Dogdyke's death already. The letter found in his pocket addressed to Mrs. Barton

had been delivered by a member of the force, and its contents had by her been made known to the messenger, who had transcribed it, and had indeed only delivered it after protest and on condition that it should be carefully preserved and produced at the inquest. Denton, who had come armed with both the letters, surrendered them to the care of the inspector.

'And now,' he said, 'I presume you will arrest your man at once?'

'Undoubtedly,' the official answered.

Instructions were issued, and two men were despatched in a cab to the Count's residence. Denton and the General meanwhile awaited news at the station. In less than an hour intelligence reached them of the Count's departure. His servant had packed his portmanteau on the previous day, and he had left word that all letters arriving for him should be addressed to him at a bank in Adelaide.

'That,' said Denton, 'is of course a blind.'

The inspector nodded, with a smile.

'Of course. But we'll wire to Adelaide, all the same.'

'Has the man got wind of us already?' the General asked. 'How did he know that this incriminating letter was in our hands?'

Denton stroked his chin thoughtfully for a second or two. 'Possibly,' he answered, 'he may not have taken the alarm at the time at which he started. When did you get news of the finding of the body?'

'Last night, a little after midnight,' the inspector answered. 'The letter was brought by a mounted messenger early this morning. We shall have the body down here this evening for identification, and since you gentlemen knew the man I should be glad if you would come and have a look at him.

'We can waste no time,' Denton interjected. 'Count von Herder may have gone to Adelaide, believing himself to be in safety, or he may have taken the alarm, and gone elsewhere. I should suggest that inquiries

be made at every point of exit. The Count is rather a remarkable man to look at; somebody is sure to have noticed him.'

The hue and cry was out now. Booking-clerks, porters, dock officials, and steamboat clerks were everywhere consulted, and in an hour or two it was known that the Count had booked for Brisbane.

'Now, have we time to stop him there?' Denton inquired, eagerly.

'No, sir,' the inspector answered. 'The train, if it were punctual, reached Brisbane an hour ago.'

'We must wire after him,' cried the General.

'Oh, sir,' returned the inspector, 'that has been done already. We have wired to all the big centres. His only chance would be to drop off the train before he got there. It's pretty certain now he knows we are likely to be after him. Adelaide was a blind, you see, sir.'

'When's the next train north?' the General

demanded. 'I'll follow him. It will be useful to have somebody at hand to identify him.'

'The next train starts to-morrow evening, sir,' the official answered.

'To-morrow evening!' responded Mallard, almost desperately. 'That won't do for me. Denton, you'll accompany me?'

'Willingly,' said Denton. 'I'll be of what service I can to you. What do you wish me to do?'

'I shall take a special train,' said the General. 'The villain can't have had time yet to spend all the money of which he swindled me. He can't have got through one hundred and twenty thousand pounds in four months. It will be worth while to spend a little money to lay hands on him.'

At this juncture Hawthorne presented himself, eager for the news.

He had driven down in Barton's carriage, and, learning that the General had resolved on ordering a special train, offered at once to conduct him and Denton to the railway station.

'Let me come with you, General Mallard,' he asked, as they drove away together. 'I'd like to be of service if I can. If I had been less lenient to Count von Herder I might have hunted him out of Australia, and I feel as if some of the responsibility of this crime rested upon my shoulders. I may be of service. Let me come.'

The General assented, though not with the best grace in the world. A special train was asked for, but was not to be had in a minute or an hour. There was prodigious telegraphing to and fro, and notwithstanding the urgency of the case and Mallard's high official authority, there was a heavy payment demanded. The General drew out his chequebook without demur, and signed for the amount. There had been time to despatch messengers for some little provision in the way of luggage, and time also for the three men to snatch a hasty and agitated meal. At last the train was ready, and the three gentlemen, accompanied by an officer of police who bore a

warrant for the arrest of Count von Herder on the double charge of forgery and murder, took their places and were whirled away. There was but little speech amongst them as the train sped on through the blank void of night. The city was soon behind them, a mere congregation of fiery sparks, and then was nothing —lost, swallowed up in distance. After hours and hours of travelling, they picked up one clue midway. The Count had unmistakably been seen on the last regular journey, when the train had waited for the customary twenty minutes to allow the passengers to breakfast. He had been seen, and noted, by two or three people who were unanimous in describing him —a tall, broad-shouldered, stout man, magnificently dressed, and wearing much jewellery—a gentleman who wore gold-rimmed eye-glasses, who was clean shaven except for a moustache, who spoke with a foreign accent, who wore long hair just touched with grey, curling inwards at the ends, and almost reaching to his shoulders. A noticeable, scarcely a mis-

takable man. So far, then, they were on the track. On they sped again, with the passion of the man-hunter growing in every heart. All but Hawthorne had had some experience of that sensation before, but to him it was strikingly novel and absorbing. Denton, vicariously at least, had hunted hundreds; the General had tracked to his doom an infamous rebel in the days of the great Indian Mutiny; and to the police officer the chase was no more than a rather bigger thing than usual in the ordinary way of business. The hunters, in spite of their excitement, slumbered now and then, and when Hawthorne awoke with a start from some brief dream-broken nap, as he did pretty often in the course of his journey, the slumbering elders looked a little ghastly to him. Denton, with his mouth open and his head pendent on one side, looked rather like a criminal on whom the last sentence of the law had been executed than a respectable member of society and the Bar engaged in the attempt to enforce justice. Mallard sat shaking to the

motion of the train, grotesquely unlike himself, with his eyeglass fixed in a closed eye, and his head rolling from side to side like that of a porcelain mandarin set nodding.

The very gravity of the issue involved in the journey made these trifles emphatic, and begat in Hawthorne's mind a sense of the ludicrous, not altogether untouched by hysteria. He could have laughed aloud had it not been for shame at the absurdity of Denton's half-dead, half-drunken look of *savoir faire*, with his head lurched on his shoulders, and his nose trumpeting forth broken music. But the hunter's zeal was uppermost in spite of all, and he longed to be at physical grips with the villain who had first, for his own purpose, apprised him of his origin. The Count had given Hawthorne a father and a mother, and in spite of all the troubles this newly-revealed relationship had brought upon him the young man's heart was full of love for both of them. But the poor Dogdyke, whom he faintly remembered

through dim and far away mists of infancy, lay dead at this scoundrel's hands, and the girl Hawthorne loved with all his soul had been almost beggared by him. Sleep was disturbed by monstrous dreams, and the minutes of waiting were filled with ridiculous fancies, and through them all the awakened man-hunting spirit burned. About three o'clock in the evening all were sleeping, half sick with the constant rocking of the train, which for the last thirty miles had been forced at its highest speed, and half conscious of a biting sunlight through closed eyelids, when the brake was suddenly applied, and the loud jarring of the wheels and the clatter of shaking windows shook them broad awake.

'What's the matter here?' cried Denton.

The officer sprang to his feet, threw down the window, and reported the danger signal not far ahead.

'We're within a mile of the last station before Brisbane, gentlemen,' he added. 'It's as likely as not our man might have dropped

off here. We'd better ask. Shall I give him the word to stop?'

Denton assenting, the man opened the door, climbed down to the permanent way, and walked towards the engine. He had there a moment's conversation with the driver, and, returning, had barely seated himself when, with a scream, the train started once more. In five minutes they drew up at a platform. Denton's head had been through the window for the last sixty seconds, and when the train drew up, a police officer waiting on the platform ran towards him.

'General Mallard's special?'

'Yes.'

'Your man dropped off here just this time yesterday.'

CHAPTER XLV

The Count von Herder was not the man to run his head into a trap if he knew it. He had reckoned on the possibility, the almost certainty, of a wire reaching Brisbane before the arrival of the train, and had taken the only chance open to him. By this time his plan was clear in his own mind, and save for the necessary departures which might be forced upon him by circumstances, he had arranged it in almost every detail. Spite of his stoic nerve, his heart beat flutteringly as he stepped on the platform, portmanteau in hand. But his foreign affability and condescension were as marked as ever. When the train had cleared the platform, and his quick eye had taken note of the fact that no guardian of the peace was present there, he

hailed a porter and made inquiries about the address of an imaginary resident in the neighbourhood. Naturally enough, the porter had no knowledge of the imaginary resident, and referred him to a sunburnt corn-stalk of a man who sat languidly smoking on the driver's seat of a buggy outside the station. He, though professing to know the whole district to a range of twenty miles, was equally ignorant with the porter, and the Count, with a comic despair, professed that he might as well have gone straight to Brisbane. He had been told, he said, that he would save an hour's hard driving by alighting here, and now all that remained to him was to increase the length of his journey by a drive into Brisbane, where he would easily be able to find the address he needed. He chatted amiably to the long man on the box of the buggy, concluded his bargain, tipped the porter for assisting him with his portmanteau, and was driven away. All things considered, the man's possession of himself was colossal.

The driver happened to be a talkative man, and kept the Count engaged in a conversation nearly all the way. He was full of condescension and amiability, listened with well-feigned interest to whatever his companion had to say, and responded with an unflagging good humour, for the mere semblance of which he paid a terrible price within. He was flying for his life, and at any moment the winged messenger of the wire, who is the chief dragon of the escaping criminal now-a-days, might bring detection and arrest upon him; but to seem alarmed or nervous was the surest way to draw down suspicion, and to play the part of a gentleman altogether at ease was the surest way of disarming it. He listened, therefore, to the driver's ceaseless flow of trifles, and chatted back to him about the most trivial incidents of his journey, the state of the weather, the rate of wages, the yield of last year's wool, and a hundred other things in which he took no earthly interest. All the while in his own mind the clamour of

pursuit was at his heels, and all the while the recumbent body of the dead Dogdyke stretched out a hand which pointed a threatening revolver at his heart. He suffered horribly, but he suffered with a great composure.

'We're pretty nigh on Brisbane now, sir, said the driver at length. 'There's a peep of the river, and, once round that clump of bamboos yonder, you'll see the city.'

'Inteet,' the Count responded. 'I'd thought that the chourney was longer. You have passed away the time very nicely by your agreeable gonversation, my frient.'

The compliment seemed to turn the hitherto conversational and amiable driver a little sulky, for he responded rather gruffly:—

'There, you see it? Where do you want to drive to?'

'There is an hotel called the Pelle Feu?' said the Count.

'The Belle Vue? Yes. Want to go there?'

'If you please,' the Count answered,

sweetly. His heart beat more and more rapidly as he entered the streets of the city. The next hour would in all probability decide his fate, and meantime, for aught he knew, he might be entering the very jaws of the lion. The position was difficult, but he braced himself to meet it.

Arrived at the hotel, he paid the driver handsomely, but not extravagantly enough to excite the suspicion which he constantly dreaded to awaken; saw his portmanteau carried into the hall of the hotel, and had his name entered in the books as Mr. Schneider, of Melbourne.

He drank a glass of sherry and bitters, lit a cigar, and walked out of the house. The four thousand pounds he had drawn was snugly tucked away in notes and gold in a money belt strapped about his body, and as he walked he felt it once or twice with his hands to make sure of its presence there. Many people remarked him in the streets, and he was aware of their scrutiny. Strangely

enough, dangerous as it was to him to be noticed, he felt, as he had always done, a certain pride in the interest he excited. He was a mass of vanities, and he had long since accepted the general observation awakened by his dress, his swagger, and his overdone air of self-importance, as attributable to his personal charms. Even now that it might have been worth life and liberty to him to be shrouded in blank darkness, he felt pleased at the interest he excited.

He had heard casually, months and months ago, long before he had ever guessed that the information would be of use to him, of a certain gambling-house which stood near the river, on the seaward outskirts of the town. In those days, when manners were freer than they have been of late years, when the police were not so well organised as now, and when the gambling spirit ran high amongst all classes, this place had had a great repute. But it had now fallen into desuetude, except for a *clientèle* of scoundrels, white and yellow,

who still, in defiance of the public regulations, kept up some faint copy of the old tradition. Twenty years back thousands of pounds had changed hands in a night there, and the Chinese proprietor of the place had amassed a fortune. There had been luxurious saloons for smoking, saloons as gorgeous for the refreshment of the visitors of the place, and *fantan* had yielded fortunes to its votaries, or left them all but naked.

The Count von Herder had some hope that he could find this place, and looked to it as to an ark of safety. He walked until town began to fade into country. There was still a mixture of the two, and on the riverside there were blocks defaced by half-completed building operations. Here and there a Mongolian in his blue linen blouse, and under the shade of his pagoda-shaped hat, worked leisurely in his own inclosure. Two or three hundred yards away was a hybrid sort of house, half water creature, half land creature. The river side of it was built on piles, and it was all

outwardly of wood and corrugated iron. It was a biggish edifice, but looked as if it were fast tumbling into ruin.

The Count wondered if this might be the place he sought, and assuring himself by a backward and forward inspection of the road that he was unobserved, he hailed a worker in a little patch of garden at his left.

'John!'

The man raised an expressionless, orange-coloured face, and looked at him with a listless, sleepy inquiry. The Count drew a half-crown from his pocket, and held it up between his gloved thumb and forefinger.

'Come here!'

The Mongolian approached, smiling at the coin.

'Dit you ever hear of the game of fantan, my frient?' inquired the Count.

The Oriental's eyes twinkled, but he said nothing.

'What!' said Von Herder, 'you never heard of the game of fantan? Eh—never?'

'Sometimes,' said the Celestial.

'Do they play it,' inquired the Count, 'in that big house over yonder?'

'Sometimes.'

'Can one get a smoke there?' the Count inquired, approaching the coin to the Celestial's palm. 'Can I have a little quiet smoke there?'

'Opee?' asked the gardener.

'Yes,' said the Count.

'Yes,' said the Chinaman.

The Count dropped the half-crown into his palm, and sauntered on. Not a creature was in sight, and he began to feel that he was at least within measurable distance of safety.

The house stood before him, apparently deserted, like some great centipede walking with a hundred slimy legs from land to water, and suddenly arrested in its course. Some of the windows were boarded up, and the glass in others was broken. The whole place had a weird, unoccupied aspect, and wore, too, a

certain air of the night about it, as if it were ashamed to be abroad in daylight.

When he reached the door he found it open, and entering he struck with his walking-cane twice or thrice upon the floor. There was no response, but an open door within the corridor invited him, and he ventured into the ill-lit room, which reeked of opium. A yellow, wrinkled man rose at his entrance, and approached him with lacklustre eyes.

'Goot day,' said the Count.

'Velly good day,' the wrinkled man answered.

'Can you gif me a pipe?' asked the Count.

The yellow skeleton, with the parchment skin shining tightly on his forehead, nodded by way of answer.

'And a private room?' the visitor demanded.

The man nodded once more.

'That will do,' said the Count. 'Show me the way.'

The man shuffled before him, and led

him to an apartment furnished solely with a carpet which had once been handsome, and a ragged settee of ruby-coloured velvet. The Count closed the door, and faced his host.

'Does this place pelong to you?' he asked.

'All belong a me,' the man responded. 'No good now.'

'You understand what I am saying to you?'

'Velly well,' said the Chinaman. 'John he sabe you, not fear.'

'Should you like,' said the Count, bending over him and speaking in a whisper, 'should you like to earn fifty pounts?'

The yellow skeleton grinned and leered at him by way of sole response.

'You understand me—eh?'

'No fear,' the other answered. 'Understand, sabe all lity.'

'I don't want to smoke a pipe,' said the Count, 'but I want to be quiet.'

'All lity.'

'I want you to find for me a boat which will take me anywhere from here.'

The man nodded and twinkled, but made no verbal answer.

'Can you do it? If you can, I'll pay you fifty pounts.'

He drew off his left-hand glove, thrust his hand into his trouser pocket, and shook there a handful of gold.

The Celestial was wide awake by this time, and smiled horribly at the Count. The Count withdrew his hand, and showed a pile of sovereigns.

'Fifty pounts, my goot frient, if you will keep me quiet somewhere—anywhere, until you can find me a boat—a steamboat. You understand?'

'All lity,' his host responded. 'You stoppee here. Do it all. No fear, my word.'

The Count beckoned for the other's hand, and doled out on to his palm ten sovereigns, one by one.

'You understand?' he said. 'Forty more when you haf found the boat.'

'You stoppee here. All lity, no ellor.'

The Count, disposing his hat on the floor, sat down on the settee and prepared himself to wait. His protector shuffled away in his wide, blue linen trousers and boots, closing the door behind him, and leaving the Count to solitude and his own reflections.

He sat plunged deep in speculations, when, without any preface, a little half-bred Chinese boy flung the door open with a bang, and closed it behind him with a bang, and swaggered into the apartment. He was three feet high at the outside, but judging from his countenance he might have been ninety or a hundred years of age. He was dressed in an odd compromise between Chinese and European fashion. His trousers were of corduroy, and he carried his hands in his pockets, but he wore the distinctive Chinese hat, blouse, and boots. He nursed in his cheek a quid

of tobacco, and occasionally expectorated with no embarrassment upon the carpet.

'Say, boss,' he began, with an accent of Irish. 'Dad wants to know—you ain't going away in them togs, are you? Will I buy something else for you?'

'You're a fery clefer little boy, my young frient,' the Count responded, piercing through the apparent disguise of years. 'That is a very excellent itea. You shall puy for me a suit of clothes.'

'Ye'll not want 'em swagger,' said the boy, 'like them things you're wearing?'

'You are a fery clefer boy,' the Count responded. 'I shall not want them swagger. Come here, my clefer little boy, there's a sovereign for you.'

The boy took the sovereign with a grin, spat on it, and thrust it into his trousers pocket.

'Stand up,' he said. 'Let me have a look at you.'

The Count smilingly obeyed. The boy

walked deliberately round him, nodding once or twice, and ended his inspection by the remark that he thought he could fit him pretty decent. He then left the room, and for the space of two hours the Count was left entirely to himself. The time hung heavily, and but for an occasional consultation of his watch, he would have believed his time of loneliness double its real length. The boy returned at last with a parcel and a companion.

The companion, a middle-aged, expressionless Chinaman, brought in with him a bamboo chair, and a small bamboo table. Having set these down in the middle of the floor, he retired, and in a minute or thereabouts returned with a steaming tin of hot water, which he set upon the table. He produced a set of razors, a soap ball, a shaving brush, a comb, a pair of scissors, and a towel, and, unfolding the latter, stood evidently awaiting the Count.

'You are a fery clefer little boy, inteet,' said Von Herder, nodding to the boy.

With no further words he placed himself in the chair, and the Chinese barber busied himself about him. The flowing locks were cut short, the moustache, of which the Count had for so many years been proud, disappeared beneath the razor. When the operation was completed, the barber handed him a little circular mirror, and Von Herder inspected himself with a start of surprise. The metamorphosis was remarkable. He nodded once again to the boy, who had superintended the whole operation with a grinning interest.

'You are a fery clefer little boy, inteet. I shall not forget you.'

The barber withdrew, and the boy unfolded the parcel, which was larger than himself, and contained three complete suits of clothes. The Count, with a fastidious reluctance, chose a suit of serge which seemed likely to fit him, and divesting himself of his own dress, assumed this. It was somewhat too loose and large for him, but he was

convinced that this aspect presented nothing extraordinary. A peaked sailor cap went with the suit, and by the aid of the barber's hand mirror he surveyed himself as well as he could, and came to the conclusion that the disguise would serve.

'They won't do,' said the boy, pointing to the Count's jewelled fingers. 'Nor they, neither,' pointing to the boots.

Von Herder withdrew the rings, and slipped them into his pocket. Then he transferred from his discarded raiment his watch, chain, handkerchief, pocket-book, and money. The boy's eyes glittered at the sight of the gold, and the Count laughed at him encouragingly.

'You shall haf your share,' said the Count. 'In the meantime, my capable little frient, I make you a present of these garments. You shall get me a pair of boots, and these shall belong to you.'

The barber, having returned, stood in expectation of his fee. The Count thought it

well at such a moment to be generous, and offered him a sovereign. The man drew back and shook his head wordlessly. Von Herder offered him two. The man, still without a word, accepted the increased proffer, bowed, and retired.

'Pay pretty smart for a shave, don't you?' said the boy.

The Count laughed, and sat back in his seat, stretching out a foot.

'Measure that,' he said.

The boy obeyed and went away.

There was another waiting silence of an hour, and at the end of it the messenger returned with half a dozen pairs of second-hand boots.

Von Herder completed his outfit, and once more resigned himself to patience.

'Have anything to eat?' asked the boy.

'Nothing to eat,' the fugitive returned.

'Anything in the way of liquor? There's fizz a quid a bottle.'

'Bring me a pottle,' said the Count.

He sat over his wine till long after nightfall. The house was almost entirely silent, and no light was brought to him. He struck a vesta to consult his watch, after what seemed an intolerable time of waiting, and found that it was as yet only nine o'clock. There was a step outside, and the door creaked on its hinges.

'Ready in half an hour,' said the boy's voice.

'All right,' Von Herder answered, 'in half an hour.'

CHAPTER XLVI

In the deep silence which ensued, the fugitive could hear the ticking of his watch and the beating of his own heart. Now and again a lazy wash broke against the piles of which the front of the house was built, but no other sounds disturbed the intense silence of the night. Once or twice the halloa of a distant reveller was heard, but the house itself seemed dead and, except for himself, deserted. At length, when the half-hour had seemed drawn into a month, the boy returned, and with him came the old man carrying a lantern.

'All lightee?' the ancient skeleton asked, peering at his guest. 'Eh? Boatee leady. Go soon as you likee.'

The Count rose to his feet with a nod and

made a movement towards the door, but the old man stretched out the lantern as if to intercept him.

'Pay first,' he said.

The Count looked darkly and doubtfully from the old man to the boy and back again.

'It's all square, boss,' said the boy. 'You needn't have no fear; the old chap isn't up to any hanky-panky; the boat's there right enough, and we'll have yer aboard in five minutes.'

'You know, my little frient,' said Von Herder, deliberately, 'that I am very much pressed to get away from here. If I am not got away from here I might be tangerous. Perhaps you will be so good as to tell the old chentleman.'

'All lightee,' said the old gentleman. 'John sabe. No ellor; boaty leady.'

The Count lingeringly drew a handful of gold from his pocket, and counted down fifty sovereigns into the outstretched yellow palm of the old man.

'Better get now,' said the boy, and under his guidance the runaway set out, walking clumsily and with some pain in his heavy and ill-fitting boots.

The night was clouded and heavy, and as dark as pitch; behind them gleamed the lights of the city, but in front nothing was visible save the dull lines of the horizon, and now and then a sullen gleam of the river. The boy took the Count by the sleeve and led him.

'I know the way; come along. There's no danger now, I tell you.'

The bamboo clumps stirred and creaked with the strange suspicious noise peculiar to them, though no breath of air disturbed the night. The sulky light of the river gleamed and disappeared. A night bird uttered a cry which was echoed from great distances. A street organ a mile away struck up 'The Girl I Left Behind Me,' and the notes, though faint and distant, were distinctly audible.

'Round here,' said the boy, still tugging

the Count by the wristband of his coat. 'Round to the left; there you see her. She's got steam up already.'

A black hulk lay by the river bank not more than thirty yards away, a red light gleaming on her deck.

'Look here, boss, you're not going to forget me, any way, are you?'

'No, no,' the Count answered, with his heart knocking against his ribs so heavily that it muffled his breathing, and for a moment almost deprived him of speech. 'You shall be remembered.'

He thrust a shaking hand haphazard into his pocket and drew out a little handful of gold and silver, and clutched it until he came alongside the boat.

'Here ye are,' said the boy. 'There's the plank; can't you see where you're going?'

'I haf laid aside my spectacles,' Von Herder answered, almost glowering at the boy. He felt in some blind, vague way as if this were the supreme moment, and his

emotion almost choked him. Once aboard the boat he would feel safer, would gather himself together again, and be his own self once more.

The boy guided his feet and led him along the broad plank; a man on board stretched out a hand to him and helped him to the deck.

'All right, Patsie?' asked the boy.

'All right,' answered the man addressed. 'Get, ye varmint.'

'Wait a bit; I haven't done yet. You've got something for me, boss?'

'Yes, yes,' the Count answered, hurriedly, and thrust the money he had ready into the boy's extended palm.

The lad gave a wild whoop, broke into a dancing step, and then dashed down the plank into the darkness.

'We've got a bit of a cabin, sir,' said the Count's unseen interlocutor; 'if you'd like to come down into it, we can talk business.'

'Go on,' Von Herder answered. 'Lead the way.'

The man, seizing the lantern, guided Von Herder's footsteps carefully along the deck, which was untidily lumbered with odds and ends of all sorts. He led him by a narrow companion-way below, and there inducted him into a little box of a cabin in which there was barely room for the two to sit together. The Count squeezed himself round a table which stood fixed in the centre of this minute apartment, and the man, setting the lantern before him, seated himself on the opposite side.

'I'm skipper of this craft,' he said, 'and I've had the tip that there's a gentleman who has reasons of his own for wanting to get away. I'm told he'll pay pretty well for the job. Now, I'm provisioned for a fortnight, and I'm game to run to Noumea, and then if you'd like I'll get on as far as Fiji; but I shall want paying for it. What are you game to stand?'

'Get me to Noumea,' the Count answered, 'and I'll pay you one huntret pounts.'

'Make it two,' said the skipper.

'Make it two,' the Count answered.

It was not worth his while to haggle over a hundred pounds whilst his neck was in danger. Money was easily to be made again, according to his experience, but once in the hands of justice there was no hope for him.

'All right,' said the skipper. 'I'll take it money down, if you please.'

'No, no,' said the Count. 'I'll gif you fifty pounts down, and you shall haf the rest when we get there.'

The other cogitated a little, staring at him with knitted brows and sullen eyes. He was a sun-tanned, bearded fellow with a broken nose, and a forehead wrinkled like corrugated zinc from long exposure to tropic suns.

'That'll do,' he answered. 'Plank it down.'

The Count drew forth his pocket-book, and, opening it, revealed a wealthy roll of notes. He doled out fifty pounds from it. The man, taking each note between finger

and thumb, laid the paper flat, inspected printing and water-mark intently by the light of the candle, and finally folded up the notes and shoved them into his waistcoat pocket, pressing them tightly down with a tar-stained thumb. Then, throwing open the door behind him which he had closed carefully at the beginning of the interview, he said in an ordinary voice :—

'Go ahead there!'

A voice from the outer darkness responded 'Aye, aye!' and in a minute the boat began to move.

Once more the Count von Herder was left to his own reflections. He asked for, and was provided with, a biscuit and a glass of rum, and though the pangs of hunger gnawed him, and filled him with an absolute nausea, he felt that any richer fare would have been intolerable to him. He soaked the biscuit in the raw spirit, and, little by little, contrived to swallow it. The boat moved slowly, winding a cautious way round the curves of the river.

There were cries from the bows every now and then to direct the steersman, sung out in a wild, melancholy voice which sounded foreboding to the listener's ears. The paddles turned noiselessly in the water, and the throbbing of the engine shook the small craft with a sudden strong tremor as the beating of the listener's heart shook his frame. The confinement to the cabin by-and-bye became intolerable to him, and squeezing past the table once more, he groped his way by the companion ladder, and came upon the deck. There was a lift here and there in the sky that broke into the close, oppressive gloom, and the stars twinkled intermittently, and were veiled again; the flat landscape gloomed at either side indistinguishably.

Suddenly a glow in the distance caught his eye, and he could hear the quick snorting of a smaller steamer in the rear. He watched the glow, and for a moment fancied that it was shooting away from him on a parallel line; but even as he thought

this he remembered a marked bend in the river, rounded only a minute or two before, and something in the recesses of his mind hinted pursuit. The thought steeled his quaking nerves, and quieted the rioting of his heart. It was a mere fancy. Pursuit, to his thinking, was almost out of the question as yet unless he had been sold by his pretended protectors; but the fancy had the power to steady him, and he turned a constant eye upon the glow, which travelled through the gloomy night away from him.

By-and-bye the glow rounded the corner, and the red light came bearing down. He felt with every revulsion of the paddles which shook the boat that the red light was gaining, and watched in a tense excitement until the light had come within a hundred yards. Then a voice rang out loud and clear:—

'Brisbane Queen—ahoy!'

The Count's throat went hard and dry, and his right hand clutched the revolver which lay in his coat pocket. If that voice

meant pursuit, and to his mind and nerves it could hardly mean else, he would not yield or be taken.

'Brisbane Queen—ahoy!' the voice called again, and the red light grew nearer.

'Halloa!' called the skipper of the Brisbane Queen, sullenly.

'Heave to, there.'

'What for?' cried the skipper. 'Who are you?'

'Heave to, in the Queen's name,' the voice responded.

The Count von Herder walked quietly down the companion way, and took his old place in the cabin. The lantern the skipper had placed upon the table was still burning dimly; he opened it and blew out the candle.

'Now,' he said, in a tense whisper, 'we shall see who this is.'

The beat of the engine and the churning noise of the paddles relented slowly. The boat came to a sudden standstill. The Count could hear the engine of the boat that

followed, and, by-and-bye, felt the slight shock with which the two vessels touched each other.

'Now what's the matter?' said the skipper's voice, hoarse and sulky.

'I must trouble you to allow me to search this boat,' said a voice which was strange to the listener's ears. 'It's all quite right and regular, and there's enough of us to put things straight if you're inclined to make trouble.'

'What do you want?' the skipper growled again.

'I've got a warrant,' said the other voice, which sounded very cool and authoritative, and altogether full of doom to Von Herder: 'I've got a warrant for the arrest of Count Wolfgang von Herder on a charge of forgery and murder. I've intimation that leads me to believe you've got him aboard here. If you like to hand him over, it'll be so much the better for you. If you don't, and I find him here, you take the consequences.'

'I've only got one passenger aboard,' the skipper answered, with a reluctant growl. 'I don't know nothink about no Count von Herders.'

'Let's have a look at your passenger,' said the authoritative voice. 'Where is he?'

'He's aboard the boat somewhere,' the skipper answered.

'I think we have our man,' said another voice.

'The goot Denton,' the Count whispered, between his set teeth. 'Oh, oh! I owe *you* this.'

'Yes,' said yet another voice, 'the information seemed tolerably exact.'

The Count knew this voice also—it was that of General Mallard. The white hand which clutched the revolver brought it out, and laid it with a firm and steady grasp upon the table. All the Count's nervousness had vanished, and he was steel from head to foot. His heart beat with a calm and steady

pulsation, and the hand which placed the revolver on the table was as firm as a rock.

'Lend me that lantern,' said the General's voice. 'I'll have a look down here.'

Steps began to descend the companion ladder, and a gleam of light fell through the doorway. The Count, stealthy as a cat, placed himself at the side of the open door, and waited. The halting step came down, the light grew broader. A firmer and younger step followed, and Hawthorne called out from above :—

'Don't go alone, General. You may find the fellow desperate—he may be armed for aught that you can tell.'

The General returned no answer, but walked straight into the little cabin, and with an outstretched hand almost touched the Count's bulky waistcoat. He walked right in, and, holding up the lantern, peered around him. All this took but an instant, and at the very moment at which the lantern rays fell on Von Herder's desperate face, Hawthorne

entered. The change in the criminal's appearance was so striking that, but for the fact of his unaccountable presence there, he might hardly have been recognised, but at the moment at which Mallard saw him he darted forward, and in the selfsame instant of time the Count raised his hand and fired.

There, but for Hawthorne, the story of the gallant soldier would have ended, and the General, who had come through a score of pitched battles and a hundred skirmishes with scarcely a wound, would have met his death at the hands of an assassin. But Michael had seen the Count's swift gesture, and had hurled himself upon him with a loud cry of 'Here!'

The shot exploded harmlessly, but the burning powder singed Mallard's grey hair. Hawthorne and the Count struggled together in a mad embrace. The General was overturned; the lantern was hurled from his hand and trodden to fragments under the feet of the combatants.

'This way, this way!' cried the General, and thronging feet came hurrying along the deck and down the companion way.

There was another shot, and then, for one brief second, quiet.

The man in the uniform of the police shouldered through the doorway, lantern in hand.

A third shot sounded. The air of the little room was choked with smoke, and its occupants were hardly visible. By-and-by it was seen that Hawthorne lay all abroad, face upward, on the table, and that the Count was huddled in a corner. The officer put an arm beneath one of his, and strove to lift him, and, finding a dead weight in resistance, turned his lantern full on Von Herder's face.

'We've got him,' he said coolly; 'but he's slipped us after all.'

CHAPTER XLVII

Somebody was lying on a luxurious bed in a sort of cloudland, touching nothing, supported by no material object—floated in air, it seemed, and air scented with a humid sweetness. There was nothing to be seen but cloud, and all the cloud was close at hand, and yet the air was clear and delightful to breathe. Somebody knew just so much as this, and faded gently and quietly out of knowledge of all things. An hour later—how short or how long a span of time that lay between there was no knowing—somebody awoke again to a cloudland a little further removed, and to a sense as of one lying without volition on a tropic sea. Overhead the cloud was white; looking towards his feet the dreamy somebody saw a vague

blending of many colours, iridescent, shifting, bright, and more tenderly hued and more varied than the rainbow.

There was a hiss and bubble of water somewhere, and the noise was unspeakably delightful to the sense. It lent a feeling of coolness to an atmosphere somewhat burdensome. The unobserving observer lay at absolute peace, knowing nothing, thinking of nothing, tranquil, tranquil, sleepily, sleepily happy. The cloudland faded again, and in a while—how brief or how prolonged the unobserving observer could not guess—it was back again, still a little further removed. The cool sound of the plashing water was still heard near at hand. The white cloud overhead had receded somewhat, and with a curious recurring dazzle, faded into nothing —everything—and then slowly resolved itself into a whitewashed, corniced ceiling.

The aerial couch, which had resolved itself into a tropic sea, became, consciously to the dreaming mind, a bed, a bed of delicious ease,

and, shifting line by line beyond the dreamer's feet, grew steady, and little by little determined itself into pillars of what might be a veranda or might not, for never in the history of the world had anything ever mattered so little to mortal man; and these pillars were, or seemed to be, overrun with brilliant flowering plants. Beyond them rose a cloud of mauve, and a cloud of crimson, clouds of such colour as never sunset showed.

The dreamy eyes closed on this improbable vision, and the dreamy mind vaguely rejected it as improbable, and swooned off into perfect sleep again. Then in a time—however brief or however prolonged the unobserving observer neither guessed nor cared to know—cloudland was gone altogether. The ceiling, dazzling no longer, resolved itself into a ceiling, and its modelled cornices were, in a vague and listless way, interesting to look at.

The veranda was there beyond doubt, the flowering plants that climbed its pillars were there beyond a doubt, and their odour was

agreeable to the sense. The cloud of mauve and the cloud of crimson were there, but they had receded considerably and resolved themselves into two great flowering trees—each as big as an English ash, and each one mass of exquisite coloured blossom. There was somebody near, for there was a gentle rustle of skirts in the neighbourhood of the bed, but who that somebody might be, the indolent person lying there in absolute, uninterested rest, cared nothing. A hand slid between a head and a pillow, and a glass touched a pair of lips. Something cool and refreshing passed the lips.

It was agreeable, it was charming. Life was an uninterested bliss; nothing mattered; there might have been a past somewhere; there was a vague and feeble apprehension of that fact—but what it was nobody cared. Nothing was worth caring about. It was worth while to be happy, it was worth while to rest. Then something bent over the bed, not easily definable. The lazy eyes refused

to pierce it; and whether it were beyond or below the ceiling it was not easy to determine. By-and-bye it cleared a little, reduced itself from extravagant and wonderful dimensions, and grew to be a face. When the face grew quite clear to his vision, Michael Hawthorne suddenly remembered that he was Michael Hawthorne, and knew the face that bent above him for the face of Clara Mallard. He tried to speak, but she checked him with a low articulate cry of joy.

'You know me, dear?'

The soundless lips and the eyes said Yes.'

'You are better?'

The eyes and the soundless lips said 'Yes' again, and then everything once more sweetly and gently retired from consciousness.

Not long after, as it seemed this time, there was a double stir of skirts about the chamber, and there were two faces leaning over the bed. He knew one for his mother's,

and smiled faintly at it. Then there was a little confusion in his mind, for his mother fell upon her knees beside the bed with a gasping cry which almost bespoke terror, and the invalid understood somewhat vaguely, that what had happened should be deeply moving to his heart, and forgot in a quick little pang of pleasurable pain to think of anything. Then there was a lamp in the room, and somebody held the invalid's hand in a soft and tender grasp; two voices talked in whispers, and talked of him. The whispers were very soft and low indeed, and seemed to him to be very far away, though he had a contradictory surety that the hand he held belonged to one of the speakers.

'In a month,' said one of the speakers.

'In a month at the outside,' said the other. 'The doctors are quite sure of it. They say, both of them, that they have never found a case so wonderful. For the first six weeks they were almost in despair, but now they are quite sure.'

Then the invalid knew that somebody was crying, and that somebody else was offering comfort, and being himself unutterably placid and idle, and caring for nothing, though understanding perfectly, by this time, the position of affairs, Michael Hawthorne went to sleep again. When he next awoke, he was aware of hardly anything but a prodigious appetite; and, finding himself with half-a-dozen pillows propping him up from behind, and with a clean napkin under his chin, delightfully cool and fresh to look at, and a spoon conveying some delicious jelly to his lips, he arrived, not unnaturally, at the conclusion that he had been awakened to be fed.

'You are better, darling?' said his mother's voice.

'Yes,' he answered, in a faint whisper, 'I am all right now.'

He had felt so prodigiously hungry, that the very sense of appetite had carried with it a feeling of health and strength, so that he

had, without quite knowing it, meant to speak from the bottom of his chest, in a manly and hearty voice, and this whisper which escaped him, recalled him to a knowledge of his condition, and brought a little hysteria, which was conquered as much by appetite as by his mother's soothing.

'You remember everything?' she asked.

'Yes,' he answered, in the same thin whisper; 'everything. I'm — I'm beastly hungry.'

His mother cried for pleasure as she fed him, and did him—to his own apprehension—the cruelest turn he had ever suffered in his life, when she declined to minister to appetite, after he had cleared the cup, from which she fed him, any more.

'No more, dear. You mustn't eat too fast, or you'll hurt yourself.'

Having reached the earliest stage of irritability, which always accompanies returning health, he felt inclined to resent this hotly, as an intolerable truth, but fell asleep

before he could execute this white-hot purpose.

From this forward, for a week, the main chronicle was of eating and drinking, and sleeping. When, in the course of some four or five days, he recovered so far as to be extremely ill-tempered, and to slang his nurses, they crowed over him with a joy which anyone but himself would have found delicious to witness. Now and again the old General limped in to see him, and when he grew strong enough to find time weigh a little heavy on his hands, and to feel himself unoccupied, the old General would read to him the news of the day, and would discuss with him, for a little while at a time, the affairs of the outer world.

Sometimes Denton would steal in on tiptoe, exchange a word or two, and sit in silence by his bedside for half an hour. Most often Clara and his mother occupied the room together, talking in low voices, and busying themselves with some feminine trifle of knit-

ting or embroidery. Through it all he saw the end approaching, and, long before the inevitable interview came about, he knew that the last barrier in the General's mind had been broken down. Those things were not spoken of until convalescence was half completed, and he could bear to be wheeled about the vari-coloured garden on the veranda, where the flowers of the Jacaranda and poinsettia lay in thick masses of exquisitely delicate mauve, and glaring crimson on the lawn. He knew by this time that General Mallard had hired the house he lived in, and had fairly besieged him with grateful kindness; and when the old gentleman, on one balmy evening, came to the side of the Bath chair he sat in, and for the while dismissed his attendant, he was by no means surprised or unprepared for what was coming.

'My dear Hawthorne,' said the old soldier, laying a hand upon his shoulder, and speaking with a little effort, 'I have been waiting now, for nearly three months, to tell

you what I have to say this minute. If it had not been for you, I should not have been here, either to accept or reject your proposal for my daughter's hand. You have very narrowly escaped with your own life, and I, except for a bruise or two, got off scot-free. We won't make any words about it, my dear boy, but I hope we understand each other.'

Hawthorne turned round upon him, and held out a wasted hand. The General took it in his own, and went on with a suspicious dryness of manner :—

'I have talked over this matter with your excellent father, a dozen times, whilst you have been lying unconscious. We have come to a conclusion. The secret, such as it was, seems to me—I am speaking to you quite frankly, I hope——'

Hawthorne nodded.

'The secret, such as it was, seems to me now, to have been always rather a poor thing to quarrel about; but whatever it was, it is buried. Dogdyke, and that scoundrel Von

Herder, are out of the world, and the knowledge of the facts belongs to your father and mother, to my dear friend Denton—who has really behaved most admirably—to myself, to my daughter, and to you. I had ventured to propose, my dear boy, that the whole thing should be made known, that the whole circumstances of the case should be laid bare; but your father and mother are of a different opinion. They were willing to have your affection, and it is their intense desire that you should maintain the name by which you have always been known. On the whole, I have been brought to agree with them. There is no reason why we should set people talking. I have been brought to believe that your father has suffered terribly, for a fault he never committed; and he and I are, I think I may venture to say, perfectly reconciled to each other. I have accepted the noble dowry your father proposed to confer upon Clara, and you will live at the Abbey. I shall not disturb you often, but I suppose

that you won't object to giving the old man house room now and then.'

Hawthorne wrung the General's hand in silence, and the old gentleman returned the pressure. He was not cordial on the outside, for the simple reason that his emotions bade fair to master him. He had never been in the habit of displaying his emotion to anybody, and, at his age, it would hardly be supposed that he should acquire a trick of that sort with ease.

'Have they told you yet?' he asked a minute later.

'Told me what?' asked Hawthorne.

'That your father is coming here to-night.'

'No,' said Hawthorne. 'I suppose they kept that as a surprise.'

'He is coming,' said the General, 'and if you are strong enough, to-morrow we shall hold a family council. You understand me, dear boy? I should have been compelled, any way, as I can see now' (he assumed a cer-

tain jaunty, man-of-the-worldish air to say this), 'I should have been compelled, in any case, to yield to the wishes of that impetuous girl of mine, and I am glad to do it gracefully. I won't trouble you any more just now.'

He could see that Hawthorne's strength was hardly equal to the conference.

'But we understand each other?'

'Perfectly, I hope,' said the younger man, with some difficulty; and so, with a final shake of the hand, the General left him.

On the morrow the promised family conference was held. Tom Barton, sturdy and genial as ever, was there, sitting by his son's side. Mary was there, sitting beside her husband. Clara's hand rested, without disguise, in Michael's. Denton was present, a little unnecessarily dry and legal in manner, and strictly reprehensive of all signs of emotion, cutting in upon any demonstration of affection with business details. The General was there, as devoutly military, as Denton

knew how to be legal, and the two old gentlemen were so obviously moved, beneath the crust of manner, that their militarisms and legalities made the more openly setimental-minded folk altogether ill at ease.

Denton undertook to superintend the preparation of the marriage settlements, and withdrew for that purpose. The General retired, with the pretence of a consultation with him, and, by a sign, drew Clara from the room.

The son, and his mother and father, sat alone together, and, after a space of silence, Tom Barton spoke :—

'We need never have had a secret at all, my lad, but since it has grown up to what it has, it's best to keep it. You are going away from us, and we can't help that ; but however far away you go, you won't forget us. The world isn't quite so wide as it used to be, and we shall meet again. But even if we never should in this life, time's only a drop in the ocean of eternity. We're sure of each

other, my lad, you and your mother, and me, and when all's said and done, there's eternity beyond, and plenty of time for all of us to know and love each other in.'

THE END

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